Between Time and Eternity: Reimagining Spiritual Complexity through Musical Meaning and the Cinematic Human Figure

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Statement of originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

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Abstract

In a time defined as both an age of abundant atheism which triumphs in the wake of the death of God, and an age of post-secularism which returns to religion, the discrete forms of music and cinema remain germane sites for theorising the relation between belief and the nature of existence. Taking up the particular relation between the cinematic human figure and musical meaning, how might Marcel Cobussen’s musical-spiritual concept of “the threshold” problematise the difference between Christian and atheistic belief, so as to reimagine the boundaries of spiritual identity, faith, truth, ethics, choice and possibility?

As an original contribution to knowledge, this thesis engages a series of liminal aesthetic modes—the ineffable, the uncanny, utopian desire and absurd feeling—to bring spiritual theories of music and film philosophy into a dynamic dialogue with one another, not only to develop a circuit of reciprocity between the two disciplines that affirms the significance of one to the other, but to work toward a more complex understanding of the spiritual significance of the cinematic human figure and musical meaning than discrete theories of cinema, music or film music have traditionally accommodated alone. Drawing from a range of continental thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Edgar Morin, Gilles Deleuze and Marcel Cobussen, this thesis argues that liminal modes of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure inhabit a dynamic, indeterminate space between a belief in eternity and a belief in time, becoming conduits and catalysts for a mode of possibility I call spiritual complexity. Spiritual complexity affirms the paradox, ambiguity and irony of liminal modes of existence in our post-religious and post-secular time, where the ontological and ethical possibilities of human identity may be reimagined in the thresholds of archaic, Platonic, Christian and atheistic belief.
Introduction: Music, Cinema and Spiritual Complexity

At the end of the twentieth century, Dennis Schmidt takes up the problem of “an ethics for these times”, emphasising the plural significance of what it means to live and die in this particular time that is “ours”.¹ *Our times* means “these times of the triumph of a technological world-order, these times after Auschwitz, these times in which “the Judeo-Christian tradition…of ethics…is of diminishing efficacy.””² Following Nietzsche, Schmidt writes that an ethics for these times can no longer be determined by the absolute categories of good and evil, but would somehow speak to “our shared life in time after thinking has been released from the timeless assumptions of metaphysics, that is, after we no longer presume to think from the vantage point of an infinite and omnipresent mind that suffers no death.”³

Two decades later, a profound irony haunts this “ethics “for our times”…the time of the death of God”,⁴ as this *release* chafes uneasily against the so-called *return* of religion. *Our times* also means not only an abundant atheism which triumphs in the wake of the death of God, but *also*, as Gregg Lambert notes, the intensely politicised presence of “post-secularism, or the “return of religion”,” with “signs of this return…everywhere, and not only in the Islamic world, but in the former West as well”.⁵ Between the two perspectives, we could say that *our times* encompasses both the continuing order of belief bound to a universalising, monotheistic faith in God and eternity, *and* an embodied mode of existence that, for Schmidt, is acutely “attuned to the finite experience of mortal life” and death,⁶ a mode which is bound to the natural cosmos and the temporal world.

However paradoxically, I wonder if an *ethics* for our times must somehow reckon with this ideological impasse that continues to divide an order of creationist thought from its evolutionary other. While this impasse indicates a difference between religious and atheistic belief, it simultaneously invites a qualification regarding the subtle, yet significant,

² Ibid., 191. Quotation source: Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 192.
convergence and difference between atheism and secularism. Both atheism and secularism are often used interchangeably to refer to non-religious, non-sacred matters of the temporal world. More complexly, while atheism entails the rejection or absence of belief in the existence of an omnipotent God or gods, secularism may further entail an acceptance and respect for the difference, diversity and equality of religious beliefs. If our time may be thought as post-religious and post-secular, it is so in the very particular, political sense that the religious/non-religious divide is directly influenced by those non-secular attitudes present in both religious and non-religious belief systems.

More precisely for this thesis, and against this political backdrop, we could say that the Christian/atheist divide continues to be directly shaped by those adversarial attitudes of intolerance, supremacy and hierarchy that are present in both Christianity and atheism, and which continue to compel the posthumanist project regarding the nature and purpose of human identity. As such, the image of human existence—as traditionally determined through the dualistic sites of the spiritual and the material—is fundamentally connected to this impasse, as it moves ambiguously between a belief in the truth of eternity, and a belief in the truth of time. This difference, as well as its crossing, continues to play out in the world of art and aesthetics, where the complex problems of mediation, representation and imagination roam freely. In tune with an ethics for our times, and alluding to a rather different mode of spiritual belief, the following ruminations prepare a profoundly different image of identity and existence for thought, one that engages music and cinema to move beyond the either/or predicament of the Christian/atheist divide, one that moves between time and eternity, and one that may yet be possible, perhaps even necessary, for our times now.

“Some day,” writes Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan at the turn of the twentieth century, “music will be the means of expressing universal religion. Time is wanted for this, but there will come a day when music and its philosophy will become the religion of humanity.”7 Almost a century later, musicologist Wilfred Mellers contemplates the place of music in relation to the now “familiar theme” of “the Decline of the West”.8 “There is,” he writes, “a widespread belief that music—and the civilisation of which music is a part—has reached

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some kind of crisis. …whether or not we still live in a Christian civilisation, we cannot escape the implications of our Christian heritage.”⁹ Around the same time, Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky responds to modernity’s departure from “a true faith in God”, speaking of cinema’s role in relation to “the chronic syndrome in modern man, who could be diagnosed as being spiritually impotent. …The aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good.”¹⁰ And in his cinema books, Gilles Deleuze offers yet another, more complex dimension to this simultaneous lacuna and remainder that manifests its tension in the artworld. Toward a cinema of faith, he writes, “Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief.”¹¹

In these powerful ruminations, the discrete forms of both music and cinema are individually presented as mediums of spiritual edification, consolation, hope and salvation, the essence of their combined message reclaiming the curative role of art amidst the departure from and return to religion. Yet as if to complicate this movement, these reflections also collectively suggest that the concepts of spirituality and faith have drifted from their purely religious, orthodox moorings, at once unsettling and reaffirming the traditionally distinct sites of Christian and atheistic thought. Ambiguously, both music and cinema would seem to invoke the presence of a radically different kind of sign, a different kind of faith, one that somehow involves this departure and return, but also moves beyond its adversarial division. While Khan’s Sufi mysticism would seem to be the exception to the western focus of Tarkovsky, Mellers and Deleuze, his appeal for a universal musical religion prophecies their acknowledgement regarding the spiritual wound of a ‘world’—a ‘humanity’—that remains, inevitably and ironically, without the triumphant victory of either the universal harmony promised by religion, or the progressive equality and diversity promised by secularity: caught between the two, the very concept of human identity carries within it the uneasy traces of existential paradox. Recalling theories of existence such as Kierkegaardian despair, Nietzschean nihilism and Sartrean absurdity, twentieth-century humanity appears as a spiritual no-man’s-land, with the worlds of music and cinema deeply invested in the stakes of

its anguish and ambivalence; an anguish regarding the nature and purpose of existence, what it might mean to still be, in some imprecise sense, spiritual or spiritually potent, and the extent to which this anguish—including its origins, mutations, annihilations, catharses and remedies—inhabits theories regarding the meaning (and meaningfulness) of music and cinema.

Taken together, I wonder whether these testimonies give rise to the presence of a more complex spiritual sensibility, one which appears to be stranded in the ideological crossroads of western binary thought, yet which is nonetheless already moving in an indeterminate space shaped by aesthetics. Amidst these reflections, it is as though a new image of human identity is in the process of taking shape; a new mode of existence and a new mode of faith which appears to be radically at odds with the certainty implicit to the binary logic of both religious and atheistic thought; a mode which still believes itself to be spiritual in some sense but which, as musicologist Marcel Cobussen writes, is marked by a sense of “wandering…groping…erring”;12 a mode which also registers what Lambert perceives as “a new openness, a new horizon, a new hope for religion without “religion”,” whose signs “announce the moment when God finally succumbs to something like a peaceful (albeit not natural) death, at the very moment when the word “religion” loosens its death grip on life”;13 an ambiguous mode whose liminal nature unsettles the hierarchy between traditional polarities of existence such as presence/absence, time/eternity, soul/body; a mode which necessarily invokes both music and cinema as conduits and catalysts for imagining and reimagining human identity in a time when, as posthumanist dialogues affirm, the concept of ‘the human’ has itself become absurd.14

This ambiguous mode of existence, crossing the border between music and cinema, presents an entirely unique space for theoretical consideration; a space, I argue, that does not so much “bridge” the ontological and ethical theories of music and cinema, but is, following Cobussen, a threshold for rethinking the nature, place and purpose of spirituality in a time—a world—where the death of God and religious faith coexist uneasily. The concept of the threshold, I suggest, offers a dynamic response to Deleuze’s credo for an affirmation of life

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through art, and the possibility of a whole transformation of belief. With this aim, this study takes up the provocative sense of belief that moves ambivalently through and between the boundaries of musical meaning, the cinematic human figure and the concept of spirituality, to draw out an image of human existence that would seem profoundly fit to respond to the question of an ethics for our times, a mode which I theorise, through a multi-layered methodology, as spiritual complexity.

Methodology for Theorising Spiritual Complexity

The bespoke methodology devised for this thesis is necessarily complex, and aims to perform the following inter-connected movements: to problematise the film music argument that establishes an anthropocentric, logocentric bond between musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, and to place this bond within the broader western historical, philosophical and religious context of dualism; to bring the two entities of this bond into an intensely cross-disciplinary space to rethink the ontology and ethics of both—be they separate or together—beyond hierarchical, binary-ordered thought systems while simultaneously acknowledging the continuing presence of such systems; to demonstrate that both musical meaning and the cinematic human figure are conduits and catalysts for theorising a mode of spirituality that moves between human and cosmos; to argue the theoretical significance of the paradox, ambiguity and irony intrinsic to such liminality; and to allow the full extent of this spiritual complexity to problematise the boundaries between archaic, Platonic, Christian and atheistic belief systems.

Ultimately, through these movements, the thesis aims to draw out a complex mode of spirituality that thrives in the collective assemblage of existing liminal theories of soul, spirit and body: I argue that a manifold of thresholds between film and music philosophy provides provocative possibilities for reimagining spiritual identity beyond the traditionally essentialist concept of ‘the soul’ in this post-secular, post-religious time. To this end, the claims, arguments, questions and interventions in this thesis are developed through a multi-layered methodology, with each chapter attempting to critically and creatively engage with what it means to search for a spiritual sensibility in the folds of such discord, with a keen awareness of, and sensitivity to, the potentially adversarial response that such a threshold may attract. Yet I believe this is one of the principle possibilities of aesthetics; to provide a quieter space for rigorous self-reflection, to open out modes of thought that challenge the premises of
institutionalised belief, thus preparing a pathway for a genuine metamorphosis of thought for life itself, one which allows us to live into the ethical possibilities immanent to such spiritual complexity.

Inspired by Edgar Morin’s own method of complex thought, which is intensely interdisciplinary, highly attuned to personal experience and critically invested in the anthropological significance of paradox, uncertainty, disorder and contradiction,15 the methodology prepared for this thesis takes a necessarily plural and personalised approach. The following interlocuting layers are active throughout the thesis, which together generate a dynamic *circuit of reciprocity and transformation* between musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, the movement of which makes a theory of spiritual complexity possible:

1. Presence and absence, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, *mythos* and *logos*
2. The concept of *the threshold* as developed by musicologist Marcel Cobussen
3. The ontological-symbolic elements common to reality, mysticism, music and cinema
4. Liminal modes of existence: the cinematic human figure and musical meaning
5. human-cosmos unity: anthropomorphism, cosmomorphism, transformation
6. aesthetic modes: utopian desire, absurd feeling, the ineffable, the uncanny

This layered methodology ultimately hopes to show that a theory of complexity, drawn from disparate theories of music and film, is able to contribute meaningfully to the incertitude and ambivalence that surrounds the notion of spiritual belief, through the following four stages of liminal existence: the imprecise soul, the undead spectre, the living spirit, and the body of immanence. In this sense, the thesis hopes to affirm the possibilities of both *spiritual* complexity and *theoretical* complexity. As this study is primarily an engagement with *both*, I preface the following exegesis of the methodology with several important caveats. Firstly, I do not provide extended audio-visual analyses of films or musical works, nor do I use the formal, technical terminologies and languages of music and film, which may certainly put

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readers of *either* music *or* film at a significant disadvantage. Instead, I offer examples, where necessary, which illustrate or further clarify the particular ideas in play, or which concretise my own interventions. Secondly, this study does not address spirituality as a narrative theme, or as an aspect of the film’s dialogue. Nor does it not presume the spirituality of music to be limited to the categories of sacred church music and/or “high art” classical music.

Thirdly, and as an extended caveat to this last qualification, this thesis does not comprehensively address the ways in which the key theorists variously negotiate the broader “catch-all” categories of music and cinema to privilege particular musical or cinematic genres, categories, types, movements or kinds. This is not to say that the question of genre is insignificant. On the contrary, as a term loaded with the politics of capitalism, and the judgements of taste and morality, genre may be thought as a dominant form of categorisation, and as such, already entangled within the politics of boundary-making, which is further entangled in the divisive either/or predicament of belief that I am ultimately attempting to reimagine. A rudimentary glance at the key theorists I engage acknowledges the significance of category within their own belief systems. For example, Plato prefers the Apollonian sobriety of the contemplative modes, while Nietzsche loves the Dionysian intoxication of Wagner. Jankélévitch’s Bergsonian philosophy of becoming more-often privileges high art music, while Cobussen’s phenomenology and deconstruction moves between genres and movements, including popular music, jazz and “New Spiritual Music”. Morin’s unique method of complexity returns to archaism with a particular interest in surrealism, while Cholodenko uses animation film and deconstruction to argue an animistic theory for *all* film.

As one of the most influential French film critics, Bazin writes on the realism of filmmakers from both avant-garde European and classical Hollywood cinema, while also invoking the esoteric ambiguity of the medium through his canonical ontology essay. As one of the most influential French philosophers, Deleuze also draws from these stylistically-opposed reservoirs to develop a complex taxonomy of images, one which responds comprehensively to Bazin’s own ontological interests in movement, stasis, time and eternity. However brief, such a comparison offers a sense of the diversity at play, which shows both consistencies and incongruencies between and through the disparate schools of thought.

My reason for this comparison is to emphasise that my own principle goal, in taking up this particular ensemble of theorists, is less concerned with thinking “spirituality” through the broad categories of music and cinema, or the finer categories of genre. As earlier suggested,
this thesis is more concerned with two particular components—musical meaning and the cinematic human figure—which are embedded within ontological and affective theories of music and cinema, and which speak to the anthropological attachment to the mystery and meaningfulness of existence. To develop this theory of spiritual complexity, I extract from the key theorists those elements which have a direct connection to the foundational issue of the human-cosmos bond as it relates to the space between time and eternity. While much more will soon be said of this, this unique relation may be principally introduced through the following distinctions. In music theory, I am most interested in the ways in which anthropomorphic and cosmomorphic musical meanings are theorised in relation to the modes of the ineffable, the uncanny, utopian desire and the absurd. In film theory, I am most interested in four liminal conceptions of the cinematic human figure—the imprecise soul, the undead spectre, the living spirit and the body of immanence—which also connect to these modes. Through those theories that harbour such components, the methodology advocates inclusion, plurality and extension, rather than exclusion, singularity and elitism. This means that although I do not address the problem of genre here, genre need not be excluded from ensuing studies that apply a theory of spiritual complexity: in searching for a less travelled road to theorise the relation between art and spirituality, the problem is no longer one of genre per se, nor is it a problem of the relation between the broader categories of “music” and “cinema”, but of this new relation between these particular aspects of musical meaning, the cinematic human figure and aesthetic modes, which is yet to receive any substantial attention in scholarship.

Toward this original contribution then, I preserve the earliest conception of the “music-cinema relation” which is established in early silent film and its contemporary criticism, which speaks to the relation between the “silent” cinematic figure and non-diegetic instrumental music, the latter which is understood colloquially as “the score” or “the soundtrack”. Thus, for the sake of a consistent working definition throughout the thesis, the term “music” may, in the first instance, be understood broadly as non-diegetic, affective, instrumental music; specifically, this means music without words or lyrics, which is emotionally affective, the feeling of which cannot be translated easily into words, and which is somehow inextricably linked to a belief in music’s anthropomorphic and/or cosmomorphic essence. This basic working definition allows a commonality between at least some of the many genres, styles and movements of music in film including, and going beyond, the Hollywood classical score. Such a definition includes, but is in no way limited to, the
following examples: the dynamic expressionism of Bernard Herrmann’s compositions (most famously in collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock), the ephemeral impressionism of Dario Marionelli’s string compositions in *Jane Eyre* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2011), the nomadic ambiguity of Neil Young’s guitar in *Dead Man* (Jim Jarmusch, 1995), the magical evocations of Saint-Saëns “The Aquarium” in the opening titles of *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978), Antonio Sánchez’s primal jazz percussion in *Birdman* (Alejandro G. Iñárritu, 2014), Michael Nyman’s minimalist score for *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), the diametrically-opposed hybridity of Ornette Coleman’s free jazz and Howard Shore’s symphonic scoring in *Naked Lunch* (David Cronenberg, 1991), the allegretto from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 7 in *The Fall* (Tarsem Singh, 2006), and Teiji Ito’s hybridised style for the short experimental dance film *The Very Eye of Night* (Maya Deren, 1958), which moves between traditional Japanese theatre music and the American avant-garde.

With these preliminary caveats in place, the following sections introduce each of the methodological layers, and the ways in which spiritual complexity emerges through the concepts that influence and ground these layers. In these sections, I emphasise core problems that have arisen throughout the process of this research. I also provide pragmatic connections between music and film theory which are active within the thesis yet organised across the chapters in such a way as to allow the modes of existence a more prominent presence. The layers also offer a variety of contexts for the sections entitled “Choices in Literature” and “Summation of Chapters” which follow this exegesis. It is hoped that this detailed account demonstrates a sense of the preparation required in developing a method that may contribute purposefully and respectfully to the possibility of spiritual complexity.

1. **Presence and absence, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, mythos and logos**

In striving for a method that affirms complexity, three interrelated pairs of terms have come to shape the trajectory of this thesis: presence and absence, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, and *mythos* and *logos*. The first pair of terms, presence and absence, which continue to influence poststructural critiques on the history of western philosophy and theology, are intrinsically connected to other traditionally dualistic terms that articulate a connection between human and cosmos: essence and appearance, soul and body, thought and feeling, the concrete ‘real’ world and other spiritual worlds, time and eternity. In the early
research stages of this thesis, this pair of terms quickly emerged as the catalyst for not only grasping the shared ontological and ethical aspects of music and cinema, but for also perceiving this relation with a liminal sensibility (the significance of liminality will be the focus of the second section of this methodology, entitled “Cobussen’s concept of the threshold”). As the catalyst of the thesis itself, the bearing that presence and absence has upon the connection between faith and art is comprehensively critiqued in Chapter One, where I introduce the theoretical stakes of liminal spirituality in relation to the categories of the cinematic human figure and musical meaning (both of which will be detailed in the fourth section entitled “Liminal modes of existence: the cinematic human figure and musical meaning”). Because the terms presence and absence are given extended clarification and treatment in the first chapter, it would be more beneficial here, in this first section of the methodology, to concentrate on the two other pairs of terms that more fluidly permeate this study.

Throughout the chapters, we will encounter instances where a universalising lexicon is used to describe certain states of existence, for example, Kierkegaard’s “despairing man”, Nietzsche’s “Hellenic man”, and the spiritual impotence of “modern man” already described by Tarkovsky. While this phallocentric tendency is problematic for a posthumanist sensibility, I preserve such phrases and categories as they appear in the original texts themselves, to emphasise the problem of universality that underscores even those more complex theories of existence where the relation between human spirituality and the cosmos is being rethought. Correspondingly, this problem introduces the second pair of terms that have influenced the direction of the thesis—anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism—which further connect to terms such as ‘universality’, ‘unity’ and ‘cosmic order’. As Rosi Braidotti shows, this universalising lexicon, where the human remains at the centre of all things, continues to be challenged in poststructural, posthumanist discourses which radically intervene, critique and rethink the identity, purpose and place of the human in the greater cosmos.16 Interestingly, through the paradigmatic shift into diversity, multiplicity, plurality, heterogeneity and equality, and its wide-ranging critique of a static, unchanging, universal image (and thus language) of human existence, the relation between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism remains curiously ambivalent. As film scholar James Lee Cahill describes,
while “anthropomorphism supports an anthropocentric world view that places humans at the centre of the universe”, the two terms may also be understood as antipodes, where, as filmmaker Jean Painlevé describes, we are “constantly swinging between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism.”¹⁷ This thesis is similarly questioning the desire for a singular image and language against this latter movement between the two, but does so by recognising and problematising the concept of movement itself. As the following passages clarify, I understand the difference between the two terms to be characterised by, ironically, a movement between the movement (and non-hierarchical participation) intrinsic to anthropomorphism, and the stasis (and hierarchical exceptionalism) intrinsic to anthropocentrism.

Both anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism play influential roles in the formation of the western figure of the divine human: anthropomorphism imagines the humanization of the archaic, mythological gods, and then the Christian God;¹⁸ anthropocentrism believes in the human centre of both a divine cosmos, and the secularised, political world, due to the “sovereign and rationalist ideal” for the so-called “exceptionalism” of human reason.¹⁹ In this sense, both terms are deeply embedded within the earlier question regarding what it might mean to still be a spiritual human in our time, and whether the image of spirituality can move beyond dogmatic definitions that remain logocentric, institutional and closed rather than affective, individual and open. This is already to suggest that the concepts of possibility, change, transformation and becoming play a key role in my research, which has encouraged me to pursue what appears to be an ambiguous space between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. Followingly, I find it helpful to temporarily remove the anthropo- from these two terms: as the following passage describes, the etymology of morphism and centrism provides some foundational conceptual co-ordinates with which to advance a layered methodology that openly problematises the innately contradictory situation of being and becoming a spiritual human.


Metamorphose, from the Greek metamorphoō, means to transform, transfigure, to change shape, implying the dynamics of movement and flux. In this sense, to morph means to become, to participate in the process of becoming. In ancient mythology, metamorphosis implies a change in the form of symbolic figures, for example, in deities who move between divine, mortal and animal identities. Recalling Walter Benjamin, metamorphosis may also suggest a mimetic act of change in actual figures, for example with the imaginary play of the child who becomes creature, fairy, demon or machine, or with the dancer or actor whose experimental practice similarly plays with, and discovers, new forms of identity. In these instances, the human body is the site of poetic transformation, and profoundly connected to a belief in the possibility of new modes of existence, beyond a purely ‘human’ form, through the power of the imagination.

Comparatively, centrisim, or centricity, comes from the Greek kentrikos, meaning sharp point, in or of the centre. In contradistinction to morphism’s symbolism and dynamic sense of movement and change, centricity implies a sense of stasis and stability, with the formation of concrete boundaries and categories. In the history of western thought, Catholicism remains a dominant and enduring example of centric thought, with its establishment and organisation of a static, social order of hierarchy, conformity, indoctrination and control. In contradistinction to the fluid change intrinsic to morphism, centrisim implies an unchanging image of belief and existence within a fixed order of the cosmos.

Toward the greater distinction between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism then, I understand the concept of metamorphosis—and its etymological territory of boundary-crossing, transformation, flux, change and movement—to be foundational in this task to rethink the nature and purpose of spirituality. The conceptual territory I am ultimately attempting to locate is not at all orthodox: I am searching for a process which openly advocates a movement between traditionally opposed belief systems: this territory must also allow a movement between metamorphosis and centricity, between a belief in change, and a belief in stasis, between the desire for participation and the desire for domination; following Painlevé, this belief may further be thought as continually swinging between

anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. As we shall see in Chapter One, this dynamic ambiguity also relates to a movement between the catalyst terms of presence and absence, which, however counter-intuitively, edges us closer to possible movements between the two diverse belief systems of Christianity and atheism.

The third pair of terms concerns the two divergent modes of thought that are foundational in ancient Greek philosophy and theology, and remain equally significant to poststructural philosophy; *logos* (meaning speech, logic, rationale, reason, order) and *mythos* (meaning myth, tale, story, fable).22 Through the theorists I follow, most especially Nietzsche and Deleuze, both orders are shown to be connected to archetypal figures or messengers of truth. The figure of the thinker (the philosopher), who speaks the reasoned account of things in unadorned language, embodies *logos*; the figure of the artist (the poet), who delivers the same truth through symbolism, theatrical rhetoric, performative gesture and affective poetry, embodies *mythos*. Heidegger argues that although *logos* and *mythos* are not originally opposed in ancient Greek thought, the two modes already become separated in Plato’s work.23 This idea of a *return* to, or continuation of, a rhetoric that moves between the two modes of *logos* and *mythos* is significant to this thesis in the following senses.

Firstly, the distinction between logical and mythical thought is a core *theme* in poststructural critiques on anthropocentric, logocentric theories of music and cinema. Morin’s complex ontology of cinema that emphasises a poetic mode of truth, Jankélévitch’s Bergsonian musicology that advocates Doing versus Saying, and Cholodenko’s deconstructive animation theory (each comprehensively detailed in Chapter One), are concrete examples of this.

Secondly, this manner of prose that converges or moves between *logos* and *mythos* is actively practiced, in a diverse range of styles, by the majority of key theorists this research focuses on, including Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Deleuze and Guattari, Jankélévitch, Morin and Cobussen. While the quotations that proliferate the thesis offer a sense of the persuasive and

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evocative power of such a style, they also affirm a sense of the complexity involved in theorising the relation between art and liminal modes of spirituality.

This complexity within music and film philosophy alludes to a third dimension for the significance of *mythos* and *logos*, which emerges in aesthetic theories regarding the nature of thought. For example, Morin believes that the cinema constitutes a space where the “true rationality” of both the real and the imaginary proliferates, and where the forces of belief, in relation to death, return to a more primordial, pre-Christian archaism. Morin renders an image of spiritual identity we might call thinker-worker-madman-player, a complex figure who shares a remarkable affinity with Jankélévitch’s lover of music, who embodies the affirmation for the mystery of life. Also theorising the relation between belief and life, Deleuze perceives the role of the affective cinematic encounter as a catalyst for the transformation of belief. For Deleuze, there is an *unthought* power particular to the *theatre* he finds in Kierkegaard (see Chapter Four) and Nietzsche (see Chapter Two and Four), whose distinct poetic styles *perform* the philosophical themes of existence, possibility, choice, change, movement, becoming, transformation. Each of these examples, which move between a poetic and a philosophical sensibility, enjoys extensive exegesis and engagement within the thesis.

Finally, this convergence between logical and mythical thought is taken up proactively and purposefully as part of my own thinking-writing process and practice for theorising spiritual complexity, and as such, is an integral part of this thesis. As a dynamic layer of the methodology, the development of this style is given extended qualification in the final section of this exegesis, entitled “*Mythos-logos*: an appropriate language for a method of complexity.”

To conclude, the following three pairs of terms, and the discrete *movements* between them, constitute the first layer of the methodology; presence and absence, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, and *logos* and *mythos*, each of which participates in the act of theorising the nature of spirituality through music and cinema. Toward the greater goal of opening out and problematising the difference between opposing belief systems, this means that *movement* itself, as a concept, needs to be actively incorporated into the methodology in order to reimagine those polarising categories that characterise the divide between Christian faith
and atheistic belief, such as time/eternity, human/cosmos, essence/appearance, body/soul, real/imaginary, knowledge/belief, and truth/falsity.

2. **Cobussen’s concept of the threshold**

Methodologically, Cobussen’s concept of the “threshold” is eminently suited to a theory of movement between things, including the movement between opposing belief systems. This core concept will continue to be developed throughout the thesis, and will be used in conjunction with the term *liminality*. Victor Turner’s anthropological understanding of liminality is useful here: recall its etymological origin, from the Latin *limen*, meaning ‘threshold’, which for Turner is the archaic space “betwixt and between” the polarities of life and death where the spirit thrives.\(^{24}\) With this figure of a middle spiritual mode of existence in mind, let us gain a sense of the plurality and complexity of the threshold, as Cobussen develops it in his 2008 monograph, *Thresholds: Rethinking Spirituality through Music*.

The threshold is a non-hierarchical, non-linear space of radical intervention, and potentially inexhaustible in its disciplinary and thematic application: for example, it is relevant mythologically, politically, socially, culturally, geographically, spiritually, creatively, scientifically, biologically, cosmologically, psychologically, philosophically, anthropologically. The threshold appears in many forms, guises and expressions as it captures or resonates with a prolific number of established poststructural terms; the space between, in-betweenness, the inter-territory, the para-site, the gap, the interval, the intersection, the fold, the crossing, the middle, the medium, the conduit, the doorway, the margin, the edge, the outpost. For Cobussen, the threshold is neither one nor the other pole of a binary order, but both and neither at one and the same time. As such, the threshold is not a stable space: it is an indeterminate zone *in motion*, a medium through which things pass or attempt to pass; it is not its own separate, isolated, localisable ‘third’ space between two absolute, fixed and immobile poles, sites, states, territories or points, but the ambiguous space between them that somehow absorbs and resists both; for example, the threshold moves between subject and object, affect and reason, the real and the imaginary, the dark and the light, the known and the unknown, time and eternity, body and soul. The threshold embodies rhythms, forces and dynamics that refuse to settle. Characterised by a sense of ambivalence, paradox, ambiguity,

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uncertainty, disorder, destabilisation, hesitation and confusion, the threshold is an imprecise space of continually moving displacement; it leads into an itinerant way of thinking, acting and feeling that Cobussen marks as movements of to-ing and fro-ing, of wandering, groping and erring, where thoughts, actions and feelings move through, across, within and beyond the containment of categorical frameworks, polarities, dualities, oppositions, spaces and times. Yet to immediately contradict this, the threshold is also the break, the border, the boundary, the limit, the line, the end, the obstacle, the impasse, the stumbling block. It is equally the space where a difficult realisation or quiet revelation strives to come through. The threshold entails both the nature of things (including the nature of the world, the self and relationships), and what things can do; in this sense, it is ontological and ethical. As a conceptual tool, the threshold opens out thought by destabilising and derailing particular tendencies and beliefs embedded within the logocentric, anthropocentric, phallocentric processes of (western) thought; it is a tool for challenging the habitus of linear, binary orders of hierarchy, in particular those of traditional western metaphysics, and for awakening processes that enable a rethinking—a reimagining—of what we understand the nature and purpose of truth, knowledge, belief, authenticity, choice and possibility to be.

In all these ways, the threshold is the antithesis of ‘logical’ thought in the orthodox rationalist sense; it is not a concept that comes ‘to light’ immediately: comprehending and understanding its complexity does not unfold with pragmatic, economic linearity, but involves detours, cycles, non-linear fragmentation, dense thickets, murky waters, clouded vision, extended periods of confusion. A thinking in thresholds requires time, patience, self-reflection, caution, psychological diving and leaps of faith, moments of real doubt and intellectual fatigue, a reckoning with the ironic tendency to outthink thought, a certain humility toward the limits of thought, a willingness to be suspended indeterminately in states of prolonged incertitude, a readiness to overcome, or at least remain within, the overwhelming frustration that such incertitude provokes. The threshold has the potential to intervene with how we think, if we are able to endure the discomfort of such counter-intuitive states. Following Henri Bergson, we could say that the threshold becomes the space where the qualitative, subjective time of durée is intensified to an extreme degree of discomfort, but where “true problems” also finally emerge to qualify and counter the false.25

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Toward the practice of original thinking, which leads into authentic action, Cobussen’s musical-spiritual threshold may further be understood as a sophisticated response to Heidegger’s influential declaration that “we are still not thinking”.\(^\text{26}\)

As Cobussen writes of the plural thresholds between music and spirituality, and of the sheer difficulty of thinking, writing, reading and speaking this imprecise zone, such a space, I believe, also thrives between music, spirituality and \textit{cinema}, allowing us to “(re)think thresholds, to (re)think borders and limits, to (re)think the passage from one to the other, to pass through the passage, to stand still in and dwell upon the space between one and the other, between inside and outside”.\(^\text{27}\) In tune with Cobussen’s musical threshold of undecidability and “perpetual displacement”, which “eradicates any thinking in clear oppositions, any binary ordering”, and which is “the leaving of a remainder that cannot be thought within the framework of Western logocentrism”,\(^\text{28}\) there appears to be a unique opportunity available for integrating similar theories regarding the cinematic image and \textit{its} complicated relation to identity, knowledge, belief, truth and illusion.

As the space which destabilises and derails oppositions, the threshold also appears to be eminently suited to approach the controversial space \textit{between Christian and atheistic belief}, and in so doing, offer a sense of the complexity that dwells within our post-religious and post-secular time. This is what I am theorising as \textit{spiritual complexity}: inhabiting the space between music and film theories of ontology and ethics, spiritual complexity entails an ambiguous mode of existence within which the \textit{liminal} soul, spectre, spirit and body all participate non-hierarchically in the flux of \textit{becoming}, while being haunted by, or summoning, the intensely impressionable chimeras of \textit{being}. Spiritual complexity involves the itinerant movement between different orders of belief through the presence of paradoxical thoughts, truths, feelings and actions, yet also presents a way of being and becoming which is genuinely open to possibility through the complexity that a thinking in thresholds avails.

Correspondingly, the following layers of this methodology may also be understood as thresholds which together perform the movements intrinsic to liminality: on the level of theory, I am principally concerned with ways in which music and film theory reciprocate and

\(^{26}\) Heidegger, \textit{What is Called Thinking?}, 4.
\(^{27}\) Cobussen, \textit{Thresholds}, 7.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
transform one another, that is, ways in which theories of one may be transposed into the
other, through a circuit of reciprocity, to respond dynamically to existing arguments in
theory. This attracts a collection of primary questions: how do liminal theories of either
music or cinema influence orders of binary, logocentric, anthropocentric thought? What
ontological and ethical significance does a liminal music theory have for cinema, and vice-
versa? What religious/non-religious intersections does this mode ultimately reveal for
complex thought? How do the components of each mode further open out the thresholds
between music, cinema and spirituality?

With these guiding questions, the arguments of the thesis develop from the accumulation of
concepts, contradictions, and problems that arise in the process of research and writing, the
collation of which finds clarity and purpose when positioned within the context of
*components* of liminal modes of existence. Methodologically, the components are the integral
points or markers that progress the trajectory of each chapter’s argument, their collective
significance reinforcing and affirming the concept of complexity itself. I use these
components like map co-ordinates or cues for charting the course of the arguments that
develop within each chapter, placing them within the context of existing theories and
relations, to problematise the boundaries between discrete orders of belief.

The following layer of the methodology, which begins the process of thinking in musical-
cinematic thresholds, concerns the *sensory* components peculiar to the formal ontological
elements of music and cinema, all of which have equally strong mythical, symbolic
significance, which leads directly into figures of liminal spirituality.

3. **Ontological-symbolic elements: the spirit-matter spectrum**

Cobussen asks whether we might understand music as “a modality of knowing and being in
the world…”, whether it might “make us rethink the meaning, nature, and significance of
certain experiences, of certain values…” and “address issues of place, identity, belonging,
memory”. If music is “the threshold where one sheds the mastery of the eye/I”,—the eye
being the traditionally ‘superior’ sensual modality for knowing and being—how might the
cinematic *image*—the space where the *visible* and the *representable* collude with the *invisible*

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30 Ibid.
and the unrepresentable—reciprocate, intensify and open out Cobussen’s already complex questions, rather than return them to the rigidity of a reductive hierarchy between the audible and the visible?

In “standing still” between musical sound and cinematic image, between the ear and the eye, I hope to respond critically and creatively to the gauntlet that I perceive cinema to throw down for thinking musical spirituality, and for seeking a dynamically reciprocal, theoretical communion between the two. For filmmakers and theorists who possess a musical sensibility, this threshold already has a tangible presence, with the form and feeling of music providing a synesthetetic model for cinema to transpose. For Élie Faure, cinema is “a music which reaches us by way of the eye.”31 Germaine Dulac more specifically intuited an existential bond between the two artforms which also brings ontology and affect together:

Should not cinema, which is an art of vision, as music is an art of hearing...lead us toward the visual idea composed of movement and life, toward the conception of an art of the eye, made of a perceptual inspiration evolving in its continuity and reaching, just as music does, our thoughts and our feelings? ...The integral film which we all hope to compose is a visual symphony made of rhythmic images... . To be visual, to reach the feelings through harmonies, chords, of shadow, of light, of rhythm, of movement.32

Such ‘film musicality’ argues film musicologist Danijela Kulezic-Wilson in 2015, has a clear history in filmmaking practice and critical discourse, particularly with such influential figures as Sergei Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard, Andrei Tarkovsky and Michel Chion.33 Toward such connections, Kulezic-Wilson presents the first theoretical argument for the musical-cinematic commonalities of time, rhythm and movement, noting the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of time especially in relation to narrative film.34 Correspondingly, I take this intersection of time, rhythm and movement to be one of the fundamental premises for theorising a space where the sacred and the philosophical meet. Yet, in thinking a relation between human existence and the cosmos, this threshold between music and cinema is also

31 Élie Faure, Encyclopédie française, 16/64/19, quoted in Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 8.
34 Ibid., 94–102.
inhabited by the ontological and symbolic significance of those elements which make time and movement perceptible and imperceptible: sonority, silence, light, darkness, stasis, air, space and non-space. The greater complex of these elements, in various combinations and assemblages, forms the ground for theorising both the broader rubric of spirituality, and the more particular identity of ‘the spirit’.

As the chapters demonstrate, each of these elements has a formal, ontological bond with time, rhythm and movement, yet each also has a mythical connection to the idea of eternity: in film theory, the elements are intrinsic to cinematic representations of the dead and the undead, that is, to the varying spiritual identities of the soul, the spectre and the spirit. For diverse theories of film and film music, such cinematic identities animate a measure of eternity within the world of time, leading naturally into archaic myths of immortality and the Christian belief in the immortal soul. Yet as Chapter Three establishes, the elements also form the ground for the living spirit, most especially the subtle body, also known as the spiritus, or the body of light, which is central to Christian mysticism’s musical practices of ecstasy and enlightenment. On the level of matter itself, as we shall see with Deleuze’s cinematic body of immanence in Chapter Four, the elements also actively participate in theorising the spiritual possibilities of the living body, with the subtle body sitting enigmatically beneath Deleuze’s philosophy of immanence. Through the elements that ground this spirit-matter spectrum, the chapters trace an existential progression from worlds of the dead, to worlds of the living. Moreover, as the ontological-symbolic threshold between music, cinema, and these spiritual stages, this manifold of elemental forces allows theories of reality, mysticism, aesthetics and ethics to converge. As such, it forms a critical component for (re)imagining spiritual identity within a liminal framework.

Recalling the need to “stand still” between the eye and the ear, the significance of this layer of the methodology could also be emphasised as follows: it is this complex of ontological-symbolic elements—time, eternity, movement, rhythm, stasis, light, dark, silence, sound, air, space and non-space—that primordially invites cinema into Cobussen’s theory of the musical threshold, where the vision of the liminal soul, spectre, spirit and body, and the cosmological thresholds they come to inhabit, have—like meanings of music—an ethical grounding, inviting us to (re)imagine the nature, purpose and limits of spiritual belief itself, while continually being haunted by the Christian imperative for a static image of human identity. As already introduced, this is one of the main gestures of this thesis; to articulate the
continual shift from a traditionally sacred, stable and ordered conception of human identity—the soul, the spirit, the body—to a liminal mode of existence that respectfully recognises the limitations of the Christian/atheist divide. In this way, I seek to develop a non-hierarchical conception of spirituality that responds to our own time of ideological ambiguity, thus dialoguing with, and extending, Cobussen’s own departure(s) from, and return(s) to, discourses in Christian mysticism and theology.

4. **Liminal modes of existence: the cinematic human figure and musical meaning**

The aim of this thesis is to draw out this series of liminal modes of existence, modes of paradox, ambiguity and irony, whose traditionally sacred polarities of existence—presence/absence, soul/body, time/eternity, light/dark, heaven/earth—tend to collapse and fall away, even as they are being called up, reconfigured or returned in a new sense. Such complexity, I argue, finds its most ardent and concrete expression in two reciprocating components of cinema and music. In the case of cinema, spiritual complexity emerges in the mystical nature and purpose of the cinematic image of the human figure, where the visual representation of the human form attracts plural ontological interpretations, generating a manifold of liminal identities: as imprecise soul, undead spectre, living spirit and body of immanence—whose form is perceptible through particular ontological elements (light, dark, stasis, movement, sonority, silence)—the liminal cinematic figure inspires a more complex existence than either a Christian or atheistic belief system can individually accommodate. In the case of music, such complexity emerges regarding the mystical nature and purpose of musical meaning. In tune with liminal interpretations of the cinematic human figure, music’s reciprocating cosmomorphic and anthropomorphic meanings are, I suggest, equally open to a more complex mode that moves between discrete orders of belief. Conceptually and critically, liminal modes of existence offer provocative possibilities for rethinking spiritual belief beyond the historical boundary of Christianity, especially when placed within the context of the anthropological desire for an all-consuming unity between human existence and the cosmos. Earlier I introduced the significance of anthropomorphism as a force of movement within the imagination. Following Morin, I now introduce the responding movement of cosmomorphism. As the following layer of the methodology describes, anthropomorphism and cosmomorphism are reciprocating components of the desire for human-cosmos unity, which remains an enduring and central theme in the history of ideas.
This next layer of the methodology might best be introduced via the *aura of mystery* that, for the theorists I focus upon, is believed to be intrinsic to the discrete forms of music and cinema. This aura of mystique, which I also think of as music and cinema’s shared atmospheric, affective environment, aligns traditionally with esoteric and alchemic practices of magic, and has much to do with the forces of animism and metamorphosis that proliferate in mythology. In the ‘liminalist’ music and film theory of Chapter One—Bazin, Morin, Cholodenko, Jankélévitch and Cobussen—this aura of magic and mystique is given serious, theoretical weight, and in so doing, compels a conception of the soul that moves from centric essence, to unstable, indeterminate process. In concert with the threshold, there appears to be a certain reciprocity between Morin’s *cinematic* charm, and Jankélévitch’s *musical* charm. Writing in the mid-twentieth-century, both Morin and Jankélévitch share an affinity with the problem of language, the ineffable nature of their chosen moving artform, and its relation to the mystery of spiritual existence, with both rendering an image of the soul as an *imprecise* zone; as Jankélévitch writes, “the fugitive, ambiguous soul” participates in the flux of becoming rather than the stasis of being.\(^{35}\) In both instances, the Christian soul of eternal life becomes mercurial, indeterminate, unlocalizable. This idea of an *imprecise soul*, located through theories of film and music, is but one plane, or one stage, of a progressive series of liminal identities that materialise a plurality of metamorphisms, which gradually unfold through the spectrum of spirit and matter.

Toward the complexity of the *cinematic human figure* and *musical meaning*, the mythical belief in metamorphosis takes on a more refined, prominent role when contextualised within the problem of an all-encompassing unity between human and cosmos. Recalling the bond between *logos* and *mythos*, the objective sites of the human and the cosmos have their symbolic, mythical reciprocates within the concepts of *anthropomorphism* and *cosmomorphism*. In *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, Morin argues that our relation with the world emerges through a deeply subjective process of “affective participation” and imagination; we are within the world as much as the world is within us; knowledge and belief are in a constant state of fluid interchange, forming and reforming through the animistic


37 Ibid., 72.

38 Ibid., 73.
humanised music which restores a humanised cosmos: here, the beliefs of both Platonic thought and Nietzschean feeling converge to inhabit the same space, one that restores Nietzsche’s pre-Christian archaic sensibility while being strangely haunted by the Christianity of Platonism. Toward the equally significant force of cosmomorphism, Chapter Three rethinks both music’s anthropomorphosis and the cinematic human figure’s “humanness” through an ontologically unusual figure found in two particular dance-films, one by Maya Deren, the other by Norman McLaren: here, the cosmic properties of the body of light, the atmospheric spaces of night-sky and astral plane, and the ineffable processes of utopian desire—components which are all associated with mystical practices of music—quite literally manifest in the cinema to challenge the universality of the uncanny archaic spectre. The uncanny, the ineffable and utopian desire, along with absurd feeling, together form the aesthetic layer of the methodology. While these modes will be explained more comprehensively in the following section, I introduce them here to prepare a sense of their interconnection with the affective forces that animate both the musical and cinematic encounter.

Returning to the concept of metamorphosis, Chapters One, Two and Three may be thought as genealogical predecessors to Chapter Four, where a radical reconfiguration of the basic notion of metamorphosis occurs. In this final chapter, and in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari’s ethical reconfiguration of the ontological stakes of presence and absence, metamorphosis still entails affective participation and imagination, but now speaks to the choices and possibilities regarding how we live, think, feel and act in the temporal world: change, transformation, becoming, indeterminacy and transfiguration no longer relate solely to mythological, mystical interpretations that allow eternity to have the last word on the nature of existence, but now (also) relate to Deleuze’s cinematic body of immanence, which I position as the final stage in the liminal spirit-matter spectrum. As the work of the thesis shows, this body resonates with the existential anxiety regarding the absurdity of existence, the ways in which the belief in an all-encompassing cosmic unity gives itself over to what Kierkegaard calls the “spiritual paralysis” of despair, and the problem of choice implicit to this. More specifically, this body offers a new spiritual context for understanding the ways in which the Kierkegaardian spirit influences Deleuze and Guattari’s paradigm-shifting statement regarding the absence of faith in “the world”, and the role of art to restore a new form of faith that moves beyond the Christian/atheist divide: “the problem,” they write, “has
indeed changed.”39 The liminal modes of existence in Chapters One to Three thus trace a gradual movement away from institutionalised, transcendental belief, and toward this “change” that is extensively critiqued in Chapter Four. Each one of these chapters builds its arguments through the movement of the threshold, and its shifting senses of metamorphosis—of which change, transformation and becoming are intrinsic—to advance the modal progression through imprecise soul, undead spectre, living spirit and body of immanence.

Before we move on to the next aesthetic layer of the methodology, I note the following undergirding claims that emerge from the interconnection of these layers, which permeate the thesis as a whole. Understood as plural forms of liminality, the cinematic human figure and musical meaning—and the circuit of transformation created through their theoretical reciprocity—together offer germane contributions to the increasingly complex discussions on the post-secular problem of “the future of belief”.40 This plurality speaks directly to Deleuze’s earlier proclamation for a transformation of faith that moves beyond the either/or predicament of the Christian/atheist divide. The traditionally stable middle plane of the spirit now becomes the indeterminate, destabilised threshold for rethinking spirituality, rather than a bounded third space between the stable sites of time and eternity. Following Cobussen’s framework, this means that a spirituality that responds to the existential incertitude and ambiguity of our own time cannot be defined by, or reduced to, the traditionally hierarchical, tripartite order of soul, spirit and body. From the outset, my research has sought to locate visual ideas that compliment, extend and problematise the sonorous focus of Cobussen’s work; specifically, I have sought to locate a genealogy of music spirit(s) and cinema spirit(s) that reveals the complex movement between things, times, identities, ideas and spaces. With the Deleuzian cinematic body of immanence positioned as the final stage of a series of transformations that move through this liminal spectrum, the figure of the intermediary spirit ultimately becomes an axis for the two different modes of thought—the critical and the creative, the philosophical and the poetic, logos and mythos—to begin to work with and against one another, thus emphasising the ways in which this liminal spirit acts as both the obstacle and the possibility for theorising spiritual complexity.

6. **Aesthetic modes: absurd feeling, utopian desire, the ineffable and the uncanny**

In keeping with the grounding concept of the threshold, this next layer of the methodology takes up four interconnected aesthetic modes—utopian desire, absurd feeling, the ineffable and the uncanny—to problematise the relation between affect and faith within the circuit of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure. Specifically, the aesthetic modes crystallise a connection between affective *feelings* of spirituality as they arise in the thresholds of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, and liminal *spaces* of spirituality that are symbolically connected with those feelings. Following the key theorists of this study, these affective components are directly connected to the following liminal sites which problematise the belief systems of archaism, Platonic idealism, Christian mysticism and atheism: the secretive space between the self and the musical/cinematic encounter (encompassing the ineffable, the uncanny, utopian desire and absurd feeling), the *absurd* space between the inner self and the outer world of humans, the *uncanny* space of archaic Hades, and the *utopian* space between heaven and earth. Correspondingly, as the chapters demonstrate, the affective qualities that animate these spaces run the gamut of feeling, from hope to despair, ecstasy to melancholia, quietude to restlessness, heightened aesthesia to lifeless catatonia.

Throughout the chapters, definitions and distinctions for these four aesthetic modes will continue to be refined and developed through the principle theoretical exegeses, demonstrating both Platonic and Christian definitions, Romantic interventions and post-Romantic reconfigurations. The following section introduces the interconnected relevance of the four modes, with simplified, working definitions of each, to prepare a sense of the ways in which they participate in the overall thesis.

**Working definitions of aesthetic modes**

In the context of the tendency to imagine an all-encompassing unity between human and cosmos, utopian desire and absurd feeling stand as opposing, yet interlocked forces. One entails the longing for, and belief in, a rapturous and impenetrable unity, harmony, interconnection and wholeness; the other entails feelings of fragmentation, disconnection, dissonance and rupture between the inner self and the outer world. One claims the absolute meaning of existence; the other existential meaninglessness. One reaches toward absolute perfection, goodness, truth, beauty, the light; the other gives itself over to the darkness,
sensing the falsity, incertitude, or impossibility of such meaning. One imagines otherworldly eternal destinations beyond the world of time; the other believes the world of time itself to be a void, an oblivion, an abyss. One characterises those feelings of affirmation that have traditionally been categorised as good, healthy and positive, and which err toward a kind of sublime agony: joy, ecstasy, love, euphoria, hope; the other is characterised by feelings traditionally deemed unhealthy and negative: anxiety, despair, incertitude, hopelessness, resignation, anaesthesia, catatonia, the absence of feeling. One has faith in the future; the other cannot envisage a future. One is attracted to other “luminous” modes of mystery such as the sublime and the ineffable; the other is attracted to “dark” modes such as the uncanny and the grotesque. One takes itself earnestly, understanding that belief itself is a serious business; the other learns to laugh at itself, as it recognises the irony of its own futility, and the seriousness with which it nonetheless takes its absurd self. Between the two is Cobussen’s threshold, with one crossing over into the other in the endless movement between immersive participation and alienating isolation.

As the thesis demonstrates, while musical meaning and the cinematic human figure are both catalysts and conduits for utopian desire, enlivening the presence of an absolute unity between human and cosmos, both also problematise the reciprocal existential anxiety regarding the sensed absence of this unity. As liminal spiritual identities whose components refuse a sense of stability and resolution, both the cinematic human figure and musical meaning may be said to move us between absurd feeling and utopian desire. Recalling the significance of the anthropo-cosmomorphic circuit of affective participation, this difference is both social and psychological; either music and cinema affirm our joyous participation in and of a world that accepts us unconditionally, or we see ourselves as islandic, alienated, isolated, alone. As the work of the chapters hopes to show, this is not a problem that can be delineated as being singular to either religious or non-religious thought: the two interwoven poles of absurd feeling and utopian desire have a place in both systems.

The extent of this complexity is felt keenly in the philosophies of Deleuze, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In Chapter Two, we see how Nietzsche returns to ancient Greek culture, where the affective Dionysian forces of art, most especially music, restores a spirit of the earth, overcoming both the absurdity of existence and Platonic-Christian utopian desire. In Chapter Four, as the cinematic transformation of these ideas, I follow Deleuze to see how Kierkegaard’s “leaping” spirit of true Christian faith reckons with a gaping, universal
despair, and how Deleuze later absorbs this spirit into his own cinema of faith in the body of immanence, where Nietzsche also “dances”, and where the need for an existence of choice, hope and possibility is extensively developed in response to modernity’s endemic spiritual impotence and paralysis.

This focus on aesthetic modes also stems from what I perceive to be a theoretical impasse in the argument earlier introduced which, appropriately, founds the niche discipline of film music studies in the late 1980s, and suggests that the modes of the ineffable and the uncanny also participate in the circuit of absurd feeling and utopian desire. As the first chapter critiques in detail, film musicology forges a dualistic bond, based upon presence and absence, between the uncanny spectre of silent film, and music’s illusions of emotional meaning. Significantly, this argument relies upon the affirmation of music’s ineffable mystery, and a reductive account of the undesirable uncanny, both of which remain conceptually under-developed beneath the greater task of establishing music(ology)’s significance in film studies. While film musicology continues to develop as a discipline, this founding argument remains strangely uncontested. Thus, because of its stunningly atheistic rendering of the Platonic-Christian theory of essence and appearance, and its forthright aversion to liminal existence, I see it as a fortuitous beginning for theorising spiritual complexity through this modal approach.

The discrete affective components of the ineffable and the uncanny may also be contextualised through the Christian/atheist divide. Both modes invoke the aura of mystery and the problem of language already described for music and cinema, with their discrete senses of spirituality ultimately suggesting a distinction between an ethics and an ontology of death. Jankélévitch argues that music’s mystery of ineffable truth has led the history of western philosophy to treat music as a kind of metaphysical cipher for the secret meaning of a universe that remains contingent upon an otherworldly eternity: in contradistinction to this, Jankélévitch believes music to be a mystery of the positive, that is, a mystery of life, rather than the untellable negative mystery which is death, the absolute unknown. As its affective other, the secrecy of the uncanny leads thought into the unsettling territory of the unsayable and the untellable, where the feelings of foreboding, fear and dread surround the idea of finitude, leading thought into the haunting unsettlements of the undead, the living dead, and spectrality. Both suggest an altogether different order of feeling than the certitude that accompanies the devout belief in eternal afterlife. The haunting presence of monotheistic
religion, which permeates these distinctions, can also be situated within the context of hope, the core affective component of utopian desire. Jankélévitch’s philosophical intervention, which affirms a relation between hope and the imprecise soul, has its traditional Christian precedent. As W. T. Stace and others demonstrate in Chapter Three, the historical link between music and theology is most concretely sustained through The Ineffable that is God’s Mysterious Being. This is again where the sublime agony of utopian desire (or as Stace calls it, the “religious hunger” universal to all humankind) naturally dwells. By contrast, as Nicholas Royle’s extended study shows in Chapter Two, the spiritual liminality intrinsic to the uncanny is of another order entirely. As the antithesis of religious faith, the more supernatural, unnatural, unholy atmosphere of the uncanny is inherently inaccessible to the Christian believer who ‘knows’ there is nothing to fear in death. Royle’s work further articulates a threshold between the death of God and the returning presence of archaism in the secularised postmodern west. While the uncanny is more-often thought to begin, theoretically, with Freud’s canonical essay of the same name, Royle argues that it also permeates the earlier work of Nietzsche: I take this relation up in Chapter Two, forging a connection between Freud’s core paradoxical component of the strangely-familiar and Nietzsche’s figure of the hermit, both of which entail the component of secrecy. In the hermit, the inner secrecy of madness is not yet psychoanalytical; rather, it is theatrical: the hermit has an inner friend with two faces; he wears them as masks, performs proclamations and disguises his ignorance. Alongside those earlier uncanny components (for example, silence, darkness, the spectre, doubling), the hermit offers a provocative persona through which to radically challenge a clear boundary between anthropocentric and anthropomorphic meanings of music.

The modes of existence, and their components, may be summarised as follows. Musical meaning and the cinematic human figure both embody modes of utopian desire, absurd feeling, the ineffable and the uncanny, which are grasped on the level of affective, sensory experience, through the ontological-symbolic threshold of elemental dualistic forces: light/dark, sound/silence, motion/stasis, space/non-space, time/eternity. These elements are also imbricated with the anthropological desire for human-cosmos unity, and its shifting senses of metamorphosis. The elements are integral to peculiar liminal identities on the spirit-matter spectrum: imprecise soul, undead spectre, living spirit and body of immanence. By necessity, each spiritual identity inhabits a very peculiar spatial threshold: the fluid circuit between the self and music/cinema, the pre-Christian world of archaic Hades, the mystical
space between heaven and earth, and the intervallic boundary between the self and the world. Each figure, and its space, evokes particular affective components—joy, ecstasy, anxiety, incertitude, melancholia—which articulate a space between the eternalising processes of logocentrism and anthropocentrism and their temporal status. Ultimately, each mode offers an image and feeling of liminal existence for thought, a figure which collapses the boundary between the real, the imaginary, and the possible. In another way, each mode advances an image of faith in the affective, ethical possibilities of the threshold itself.

7. Mythos-logos: an appropriate language for a method of complexity

As earlier introduced, I present the final layer of the methodology as a caveat to the reader, for whom the style of prose may, from Chapter Two onward especially, be at odds with that of a traditional dissertation. In keeping with the concept of the threshold, the writing process of this thesis has actively engaged a movement between mythos and logos, which is to say that it also performs a movement between affect and reason, between feeling and thought, between a creative sensibility and a critical rigour. As already explained, this style follows the tradition of the figure of artist-thinker, with which the majority of the key theorists of this study have a strong affinity: this movement between affect and reason, I suggest, connects directly to their original interventions to theories of existence which circle consistently around the problem of language and its relation to thought, knowledge and truth. For example, Deleuze understands Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and their discrete rhetorical styles, as variations of the artist-thinker—or the dramaturg-poet-philosopher—whose works demonstrate “an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy.”41 In both styles, there is a distinct sense in which logos lies beneath the threshold of mythos, where a theatrical rhetoric of plays, poems, masks, costumes, characters and scenarios animates and persuades its reader toward the unthought, which is life itself. This mode of rhetoric, where a poetic sensibility performs an underlying critical rigour (and within it a so-called universal message regarding the nature and purpose of existence), has its western origins in such ancient tomes as Aesop’s fables, Homer’s mythology and Plato’s dialogues. Each offers timeless lessons and cautionary tales regarding the meaning and morality of life beneath the veils of irony, humour, satire, burlesque and wit. Throughout this thesis, there are diverse examples of prose styles that play with this movement between mythos and logos. As Simon O’Sullivan suggests, an experimental writing practice is an integral part of Deleuze and Guattari’s

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determination to think differently, beyond the programmed structures of reason alone, so as to offer their “new image of thought”. While *A Thousand Plateaus* affirms the success of collaboration in developing this style, Deleuze’s individual oeuvre, which includes the cinema books, also marks a continual deviation from the traditionally logical and linear formalities of philosophical rhetoric.

A more fluid, non-linear, affective style of rhetoric is also present in Cobussen’s *Thresholds*, and Jankélévitch’s *Music and the Ineffable*, each of which demonstrates a poetic-philosophical voice that embodies, shapes or carries the ideas themselves. Cobussen’s contemporary work is, for the field of academia more generally and for musicology especially, still arguably unorthodox with its evocative and at times obscure compositional style, as it captures the uncanny nature of music’s secrecy and mystique, while reaching into extremely dense and sophisticated connections. Jankélévitch’s treatise (first published in 1961) enlivens his themes and critiques in a different sense, with the overall effect of his prose resonating with the feeling of his core concept of ineffability, even as he develops his argument for understanding the distinction between poetic license and critical precision, and between artist and philosopher. Morin’s *The Cinema, Or the Imaginary Man* (originally published in 1956), also advances through a certain lyrical quality, yet, simultaneously, his cyclical, accumulative style reciprocates a sense of the circular movement intrinsic to archaic pre-Christian belief. The image of Morin’s primal, mythical spectre accumulates through the spiralling, looping pattern of his work, through a winding pathway of interwoven concepts which, like Jankélévitch’s work, resists a strictly linear model of discourse. That both Morin and Jankélévitch are not translated into English until respectively 2005 (by Lorraine Mortimer) and 2003 (by Carolyn Abbate) is almost certainly indicative of the changing needs of English-language research itself, and a desire by contemporary scholars to continue the tradition of sharing and engaging with new modes of discourse that do push the boundaries of method and style.

As a final example, and as Deleuze already suggests, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche remain principle guides for this movement between mythical and logical thought. In Chapter Two we will see, with the help of John Sallis, how Nietzsche himself rescues “Plato the artist” from

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“Plato the philosopher”.44 In Chapter Four, and through the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we shall see how it is that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche communicate their philosophy via the rhetoric of theatre that Deleuze finds so provocative: toward a theatre of philosophy, such modes of rhetoric perform their arguments affectively and kinaesthetically, with shocks to the body (and spirit) of feeling,45 rather than delivering purely logical arguments whose objective reasoning is aimed to persuade the rational intellect alone.

This palette of diverse styles has encouraged me to develop a method that is not only in tune with the themes and theorists of my research, but captures a sense of the modes themselves, and as such, strives to balance a poetic sensibility with philosophical rigour. The greater reason for this returns to the problem of spiritual identity itself. The work of this thesis not only grapples with the paradox of thinking, speaking and writing the ineffable, uncanny, utopian, and absurd aesthetic encounter, but a more nebulous question regarding whether the act of theorising itself becomes a possible pathway for living into a faith in spiritual complexity. Each mode, as an affect or feeling, is the ironic antithesis of the act of theorising; it is not itself a rational thought or idea, but an enigmatic presence or feeling that leads to thinking—the feeling of the ineffable, the uncanny, utopian desire and absurdity—all of which, thriving beneath the threshold of language, resist the framework of logic alone. I believe there to be a clear commonality between the core theorists I follow, each of whom, as we shall see, may be thought to be working in the thresholds of a complex method of thought which recognises the significance of both logical and mythical thought, and which materialises its arguments, theories and beliefs through a prose style that is both affective and critical.

An integral aspect of this process has been to remain present to the many questions that have continued to unfold in the process of writing. Some of these questions are placed at the beginning of the chapters, to introduce the nature of the discussion that is to unfold, and the direction it will take. Others are organised within the body of the chapter to act as pivotal coordinates or axis points, which allow further components of the mode to enter into the discussion so as to, together, accumulate the sense of liminality in question. The ways in which quotations are used, especially at the beginning of chapters or beneath the sub-section

45 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 156.
headings of Chapters 2 to 4, also requires a similar qualification. The quotes are carefully chosen and arranged for their relevance to the particular components of the mode of existence. Although these quotes may initially appear to be disparate fragments, over the course of the chapter, I slowly forge a connection between them, to arrive at the conception of spiritual complexity at hand. Throughout the chapters, these quotes and components reappear as reminders, markers and conceptual anchors with which to engage with and progress the argument.

This final stylistic layer of the methodology ultimately reaffirms the manifold significance of the threshold. In reconciling the irony of thinking this unthinkable threshold between music, cinema and spirituality, each chapter privileges the affective poetics of each mode amidst the necessity for rigorous critical reasoning, thus attempting to materialise an image of spiritual complexity that reciprocates the convergence of mythos and logos. In another way, the core themes of liminality and complexity not only form the thematic basis of the thesis, and not only emerge in the styles of the theorists I focus on; they also influence the method, which recognises that thought moves itinerantly between logos and mythos, and that such a movement is perhaps the most appropriate language for “standing still” between musical meaning and the cinematic human figure. Through such a method, I have ultimately endeavoured to preserve the ironic complexity involved in contemplating what it means to be, in some sense, a spiritual human, while reconciling the measure of this existential indeterminacy.

**Choices in Literature**

Due to the cross-disciplinary, multi-conceptual nature of this study, there is no single literature review that exists to encompass its scope. The task to collate an appropriate body of literature, specific to each aesthetic mode’s spiritual bearing on musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, has entailed a rigorous review of the recognised canon of literature particular to each to arrive at working definitions formed through the components. Throughout the chapters, I make every effort to acknowledge relevant discourses in aesthetics as they relate to the most appropriate points of discussion. However, as each chapter is intent to engage deeply with the diverse ensemble of liminalist music and film theorists already introduced, and in keeping with the style of a poetic-philosophical rhetoric, these acknowledgements, contexts and connections have tended to occur within the footnotes,
which in traditional scholarship may be considered a space of lesser importance. In keeping with the practice of thinking in thresholds however, and following Cobussen’s own example, I do not approach the relation between the body of the thesis and the footnotes hierarchically: toward the organisation of the different tiers of literature, the footnotes have become a different space with which to transparently provide this necessary information so as not to disrupt the rhythm and style of the dialogue itself, and to do so in a voice that most appropriately and economically delivers this detail.

There is another reason for this organisation of the literature which further affirms the significance of the threshold as a methodological tool: my research into the aesthetic modes has been motivated by the ambiguities and paradoxes intrinsic to the threshold. As already detailed, I have sought to locate the spiritual significance of each mode through their individual *components*, which together form the mode itself. More-over, I have sought to understand how these components variously affirm, negate, or problematise anthropocentric, logocentric systems of thought and belief. Correspondingly, those theorists who directly critique the tendencies of western thought by taking up such components have been given priority in terms of exegesis and application, for the greater purpose of developing a circuit of reciprocity and transformation between music and film theory. Throughout my research process I have sought to consistently follow the pathways that the key theorists (such as Cobussen and Deleuze) have themselves taken, whose work is not only musically or cinematically in tune with the aesthetic modes, either implicitly or explicitly, but also invested in a conception of spiritual complexity. Throughout the thesis, I provide in-depth exegeses of these theorists in the context of the modes’ components, paying special attention to certain paradoxes and ambiguities that activate a sense of liminal spirituality in their work.

Ultimately, through this interdisciplinary approach, I hope to prepare an image of *theory* which captures a sense of our own post-religious, post-secular time; one where archaic, Platonic, Christian and atheistic beliefs cross over in search of the kind of spirituality that dwells in the opening reflections by Khan, Mellers, Tarkovsky and Deleuze. Such cross-disciplinary engagement, I suggest, creates a dynamic circuit of reciprocity and transformation between music and film philosophies, not only to affirm the significance of each to the other, but to work toward a more complex understanding of this communion between the cinematic human figure and musical meaning than the discrete archives of film theory, musicology and film music theory have traditionally accommodated alone. Such
cross-disciplinary plurality, I argue, further affirms the rich relation between aesthetics and spirituality in a time when the paradigms of post-secular philosophy, cinematic ethics and music ethics are gathering ground. As such, it is toward an intersection between these fields that this research seeks to make an original contribution, inviting connections through existential and esoteric aesthetics, anthropology, mysticism, phenomenology, deconstruction and Deleuzian studies.

Summation of Chapters: A Circuit of Reciprocity and Transformation

Structurally, the circuit of the thesis, and its exchange between music and film theory, articulates the dynamics of the threshold, again reinforcing the core components of movement and transformation. Chapter One, which exemplifies those liminal modes of existence peculiar to theories of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, acts as both a departure and return point for Chapters Two, Three and Four, where the practice of theorising spiritual complexity is more comprehensively developed. Enlivening the movement of the threshold itself, the chapters create a progressive series of reciprocating movements between music and film theory to rethink the Christian/atheist divide, and to reimagine the nature and purpose of spiritual identity beyond traditionally religious meanings. Each chapter accumulates and develops its claims, interventions and arguments by following the components of the modes, which are detailed in the following summation of chapters.

Chapter One establishes the theoretical and spiritual territory of the thesis, drawing out music and cinema’s ontological alignment with the western philosophical categories of presence

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and absence, and the ways in which this binary becomes ambiguous in the discrete liminal theories of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure. The core theoretical intervention occurs in this chapter, with emphasis on the ineffable and the uncanny, and the ways in which liminalist theorists understand these modes as interventions to the traditionally hierarchical ordering of the soul, spirit and body.

To begin, I take up Maxim Gorky’s canonical essay as the theoretical origin for both film and film music theory, both of which focus on the figure of the silent cinematic spectre. In “standing still” between theories of the cinematic human figure and musical meaning, I contextualise what I call film musicology’s argument for presence through two key gestures. Firstly, I emphasise the liminal significance of Gorky’s spectre through the discrete theories of André Bazin, Edgar Morin and Alan Cholodenko, each of which offers subtle modal distinctions for rethinking spirituality beyond Christian theology, through more archaic systems of belief. Secondly, I situate the musical argument for presence within the broader western historical context of Platonic, Christian and Romantic thought, drawing from the more complex music philosophies of Cobussen and Jankélévitch. Both demonstrate the need for acknowledging and rethinking logocentric, anthropocentric thought systems through the ambiguity, paradox and secrecy intrinsic to the affective musical experience. While Jankélévitch directly mobilises the mode of the ineffable to theorise the musical secret, Cobussen moves more enigmatically between the ineffable and the uncanny, at times deconstructing Christian mysticism to locate music’s mystical significance, at others pursuing the renewed interest in archaism which follows the Nietzschean death of God. A further intersection occurs between Morin’s uncanny cinema of the imprecise soul, and Jankélévitch’s ineffable music of the imprecise soul. Following this modal emphasis, this first chapter seeks to demonstrate the spiritual complexity of both musical meaning and the cinematic human figure through the liminality intrinsic to the uncanny and the ineffable, and to situate these forces of affect within the broader modal context of absurd feeling and utopian desire. In this way, I prepare the conceptual foundation for developing the circuit of reciprocity and transformation between the two artforms, which constitutes the work of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Chapter Two adopts an explicitly introspective, ironic, theatrical posture, to perform a reconfiguration of the relation between the two principle opposing arguments in Chapter One: here, I rethink the so-called universal tendency to essentialise music’s meaning as human
feeling and emotion (as exemplified in film musicology’s dualist argument for presence) through the liminal film theory of the archaic, animistic, undead spectre (which is understood, most explicitly by Cholodenko, to be a universal theory for all forms of film). In other words, I take this liminal film theory as a model with which to imagine a musical theory of the uncanny, so as to understand (rather than condemn) the tendency to believe in music’s humanised (anthropomorphic) meanings. In framing the musical encounter as one that is animated and haunted by an uncanny human “presence-absence”, I am equally interested in the enigmatic movement between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, where the opposing categories of affect and reason appear to converge. Taking up the additional theoretical support of Nicholas Royle’s *The Uncanny* to isolate the mode’s paradoxical or ambiguous components—the strangely-familiar, doubling, secrecy, solitude, silence, darkness, the spectre, archaic Hades, liminality—and by focusing on the traditionally opposed music philosophies of Plato and Nietzsche, I imagine a musical ‘friend’ for cinema’s uncanny spectre through Nietzsche’s own figure of the hermit: this gesture allows me to recognise, reconcile and rethink my own ‘leap’ to a humanised musical truth. Nietzsche’s work on ancient Greek theatre and mythology also emphasises the apothecary role of music, and its connection to truth and belief in relation to the fundamental absurdity of existence: in the circuit of theoretical reciprocity and transformation, this so-called anthropological problem of absurdity, so healed by music, returns in its cinematic transfiguration in Chapter Four, with Deleuze’s cinema of faith in the body of immanence responding to both a Nietzschean and a Kierkegaardian absurd.

Chapter Three takes up the notion of utopian desire within the context of Christian mysticism. Following Morin’s circuit of anthropo-cosmomorphism, the isolated concept of cosmomorphism acts as a principle catalyst for moving beyond the anthropo-focus of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, where the desire for human-cosmos unity extends out toward the physical elements of the cosmos, rather than inward to the human centre. Here, I am interested to see how cosmomorphism has a bearing on mystical practices which use music as a conduit for divine empowerment—and for actions of choice and possibility in the world—and how it problematises the archaic, pre-Christian ontology of the uncanny cinematic human figure as theorised in Chapter One. Specifically, this chapter takes up the cosmic bond of sonorous and luminous vibration, and what I perceive to be a corresponding mysticism between musical tone and the cinematic body of light, which
converges on the threshold of the living subtle body (also known, quite literally, as the body of light).

The challenge of this chapter is ultimately to reimagine the stakes of utopian desire through this figure, and to locate a new sense through which spirituality might be thought, one which reflects the incertitude and ambiguity of the age that follows both the ongoing presence and the death of God. Collectively, the chapter traces the following manifold of components: the body of light (as it arises in music and in cinema), hope, the language of negation, the Ineffable God, the sacred significance of contradiction, the luminous spiritus of Christian mysticism, and Cobussen’s space between heaven and earth where the a-theological mystic wanders in a musical a-topia. Through the progressive pathway of these components, I argue that the cinematic body of light creates an obstacle for privileging a theory of uncanny archaic spirituality alone, marking the crossing—the threshold—between an ‘old’ spirituality of quietude and certainty, and a ‘new’ mode of unsettling indeterminacy.

Chapter Four establishes the final stage of the spirit-matter spectrum of spirituality through the Deleuzian body of immanence, which resonates as an empirical transformation of the subtle body, and which lies at the heart of Deleuze’s cinema of faith. In the circuit of music and film theory, this body also resonates with Nietzsche’s music philosophy outlined in Chapter Two, where a new image of faith emerges in the relation between absurdity and the arts. This chapter also emphasises Deleuze’s reconfiguration of the concept of absence established in Chapter One: here, absence is no longer understood purely in terms of ontology; it is also thought in terms of an ethics of existence, or in Deleuze’s words, the creation of new modes of existence, where choices and possibilities of becoming animate the time and feeling of life itself. This existential thread materialises most acutely with Deleuze’s call for a cinema of faith in the body of time and feeling, and its subtle connection to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of despair. Correspondingly, this chapter attempts to draw out an image of the cinematic human figure which further problematises the Kierkegaardian influence of Deleuze’s “immanent conversion of faith”. 47 Thus, I follow Deleuze’s reorganisation of the problem of presence and absence, and the place of cinema in relation to the absurdity of existence, with absence now understood as the lacuna of faith in humanity.

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and spiritual identity now framed through the body of immanence. Noting the plurality of Deleuze’s own theoretically diverse influences, I argue the significance of a profoundly Kierkegaardian presence amidst his more noted influences of Nietzsche, Spinoza, Bergson, and Artaud. I ask whether Kierkegaard’s writings on living into a ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd’ provide a properly existentialist dimension to Deleuze’s cinematic body, and how this body might prepare a burlesque spiritual sensibility. Here, the components of this figure converge between the theatrical absurd and the philosophical absurd. Alongside Kierkegaard’s components of the middle spirit, despair, choice, possibility, humour, ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd’, and ‘Give me a body then’, I include the following components which move between absurd feeling and Deleuze’s oeuvre: the intervallic body between the inner self and the outer world, the cinematic body of immanence (time and feeling), the shock of the unthought, the gestural practice of repetition, the paradoxical presence of seriousness and nonsense, humour, the figure of the jester, the theatre of faith.

In conclusion, the chapters develop a series of liminal modes of existence, located in the thresholds of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, which move through the spirit-matter spectrum of imprecise soul, undead spectre, living spirit and body of immanence. As complex, affective modes of spirituality, the figures inhabit different spaces where adversarial orders of belief exist at one and the same time, and in so doing, open out the paradox, ambiguity and irony intrinsic to the desire for timeless ideals such as human-cosmic unity. Toward the future of belief, this thesis argues that liminal modes of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure allow us to theorise spiritual complexity, to imagine new modes of existence that inhabit the thresholds between archaic, Platonic, Christian and atheistic belief systems, and to contemplate a faith in the ontological-ethical possibilities of liminality itself.
Chapter One: The Uncanny Spectre, Ineffable Music, and the Problem of the Soul

Gorky’s Kingdom of Shadows: A Beginning for Theory

Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows.
If you only knew how strange it is to be there. It is a world without sound, without colour. Everything there—the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air—is dipped in monotonous grey. …It is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its soundless spectre. Here I shall try to explain myself, lest I be suspected of madness or indulgence in symbolism. I was in Aumont’s and saw Lumière’s cinématograph—moving photography. …All this moves, teems with life and, upon approaching the edge of the screen, vanishes somewhere beyond it. And all this in strange silence… . Nothing. Not a single note of the intricate symphony that always accompanies the movements of people. Noiselessly, the ashen-grey foliage sways in the wind, and the grey silhouettes of the people, as though condemned to eternal silence and cruelly punished by being deprived of all the colours of life, glide noiselessly along the grey ground. …Before you a life is surging, a life deprived of words and shorn of the living spectrum of colours—the grey, the soundless, the bleak and dismal life. It is terrifying to see, but it is the movement of shadows, only of shadows. Curses and ghosts, the evil spirits that have cast entire cities into eternal sleep…Three men seated at the table, playing cards…. . It seems as if these people have died and their shadows have been condemned to play cards in silence unto eternity. …This mute grey life finally begins to disturb and distress you. It seems as though it carries a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning… You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind…

—Maxim Gorky

For the fields of both film studies and film music scholarship, Maxim Gorky’s 1896 “Kingdom of Shadows” remains an archival lamplight, his ruminations on silent, sepia spectres, the movement of shadows, and a lost symphony of life marking a beginning for scholars from each discipline to think respectively—and largely to the exclusion of the other—the nature of the human figure in cinema, and anthropomorphic meanings ascribed to music in relation to this figure. While the disciplines of film theory and film music theory are distinct, their convergence on the figure of the shadow reveals a shared fascination with the uncanny and the inef

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remain largely separate, both have a vested interest in the problem of cinematic realism, with
both theorising cinema’s relation to reality through the problem of presence and absence
intrinsic to Gorky’s silent spectre, a figure that I situate beneath the broader rubric of the
cinematic human figure. In the most elemental sense, presence and absence are the forces of
life and death which, together, form the ground for conceptualising the liminal identity of this
figure. More-often however, theories of realism—be they from a cinematic or musical
perspective—necessarily privilege cinema’s representation of the living over and before its
evocations of the dead or the undead. Thus, the positive illusions of presence overshadow the
silent spectre’s equally complex traces of absence.

In film studies, models such as indexicality and motion theory recognise the uncanny
ephemera of cinema’s nature, yet more often, these interpretations are quite removed from
the more mystical dimensions of Gorky’s archaic afterlife.\(^2\) Christian Metz, for example,
reconfigures the uncanny simultaneity of presence and absence to draw out—in place of
comparatively esoteric theories—paradoxes of perceptual illusion.\(^3\) Through the collapsing
categories of the real and the unreal, and through our psychological participation with
cinema’s fantastical images of corporeal motion, cinematic presence becomes a “real
unreality”, with the human figure’s ontology rendered through its illusions of a physical,
rather than spiritual, life-force:

Two things…are entailed by motion: a higher degree of reality, and the corporality of objects.
…The objects and characters we see in film are apparently only effigies, but their motion is
not the effigy of motion, it seems real. …The strict distinction between object and
copy…dissolves on the threshold of motion. …In the cinema the impression of reality is also
the reality of the impression, the real presence of motion.\(^4\)

In themselves, theories of corporeal presence do have strong ontological possibilities for
contemplating cinema’s impression of reality, provided the nature of this reality remains

\(^2\) For a summation of indexicality and motion theory, see Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index:

\(^3\) Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University

\(^4\) Metz, *Film Language*, 7–9.
anchored within the province of the ‘real’ objective world.\(^5\) This movement toward a cinematic corporeality has a natural affinity with a materialist, secularised sense of the world, leaning more toward the psychoanalytical, cognitive, and semiotic,\(^6\) rather than the esoteric, mystical and animistic. The tendency to renounce the cinematic human figure’s spiritual ambiguities, in favour of its now ubiquitous identity “the body” has recently enjoyed some focused theoretical attention.\(^7\) As Sarah Cooper’s \textit{The Soul of Film Theory} (2013) argues, this definitive shift toward the corporealization of the figure obscures not only a speaking of the soul, but also a speaking of the darker, otherworldly indeterminacy that Gorky himself registers.\(^8\) For Cooper, the gradual erasure of terms such as soul and spirit has much to do with “a prevailing philosophical and scientific culture in which the body—whatever gender, creed, nationality, or race—is taken increasingly to surpass the need for any further explanatory principle.”\(^9\) As Cooper shows, a more complex archive exists to theorise the spiritual nature of cinema, one which articulates the shifting definitions of soul, mind and spirit through the history of film theory. With explicit regard to the cinematic human figure, it is within this marginalised history that we also find those theorists who not only \textit{preserve} the ontological ambiguity of Gorky’s silent spectre, but \textit{problematise} its resistance to such traditionally dualistic, archetypal categories as positive and negative, presence and absence, soul and body, life and death, time and eternity. Such theories—which harness the \textit{liminal} significance of this figure—offer an invaluable departure point for a theory of \textit{spiritual complexity}. By way of introducing the complexity of liminal theory, let us begin with the archaic, uncanny spectre as André Bazin, Edgar Morin and Alan Cholodenko each theorise it, which for following chapters, and in tandem with comparative liminalist music philosophers, will lay the foundation for theorising spiritual complexity.

**Affirming Liminal Existence: Archaic Film Theory**

As Gorky suggests, cinema begins as an ambivalence and a rupture, the moving image of the human figure disturbing the difference between phenomenal reality—and with it the vitality of life, consciousness, being, the plenitude of existence—and an otherworldly vault of

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\(^6\) Cooper, \textit{The Soul of Film Theory}, 68–69.

\(^7\) Ibid., 2.

\(^8\) Ibid., 2–6.

\(^9\) Ibid., 2.
silhouettes “condemned to eternal silence.” One of the more enduring metaphors for cinema’s ineffable, intangible form resurrects the shadowy illusions that flicker upon the walls of Plato’s allegorical cave.\textsuperscript{10} However, to assume a metaphysical similitude between the shadowy realms of Gorky’s cinema and those of Plato’s allegory would be folly for certain film theorists with a self-consciously archaic—rather than classical or ‘enlightened’—sensibility.\textsuperscript{11} When Bazin, Morin and Cholodenko discretely take up the problem of cinematic reality, the threshold between the ‘real’ world—of bodies, things, movement, time, space, light, darkness, sound and silence—and cinema’s metamorphosis of this world invokes Homer’s mythology rather than the Platonic dialogues, with the ontological ambiguity of the cinematic human figure acting as the recurring catalyst for theorising film’s animistic properties through the archaic conception of spirit or spectre. While their schools of thought will be seen to be radically diverse, each scholar theorises a conception of this cinematic spirit through the core threshold of presence and absence, with a keen sensibility toward certain cosmological, ontological and ethical components particular to the mode of the uncanny. Loitering ambivalently between this world and other worlds, the figure’s unsettling homelessness reawakens those Platonic questions regarding essence and existence, truth and illusion, with the incertitude intrinsic to its form neither abandoned nor resolved by privileging its “life” polarity over its darker, deceased other, or vice versa. Throughout these texts, the affective forces of light, darkness, silence, space, stasis, motion and time are accorded varying degrees of significance in relation to the presence of life, and enmeshed within these are components of death which the problem of absence disturbs—mourning, memory, loss, preservation, belief, desire, eternity, the myth of immortality, and more controversially, the question of the soul. And while each grounds cinema within the archaic world, each pursues this complex of forces and affects through diverse methods, privileging particular aspects of cosmology and existence over others. Taken together, what emerges is a rather beguiling conception of cinema as an imaginary manifold cosmology, one that includes Hades’ subterranean realm in Cholodenko’s spectrality, the luminous space “between heaven and earth”\textsuperscript{12} through Bazin’s utopian desire, and in Morin’s magical metamorphosis, a more “total” conception of a dynamic, ahistorical, fluid universe. Comparatively, Bazin’s oeuvre is the more diversely critiqued, and is now enjoying a new renaissance, offering an appropriate


\textsuperscript{11} See Cooper, \textit{The Soul of Film Theory}, 6–9.

\textsuperscript{12} Cobussen, \textit{Thresholds}, 39.
beginning for introducing the stakes of spiritual complexity. In problematizing the extent to which his seminal essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” influences the disparate interpretations of non-religious and sacred cinematic realism, I am interested in rethinking such polarities through the tentative liminality embedded within Bazin’s archaism.

André Bazin: Between Heaven and Earth

In Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic, Rachel O. Moore writes of the strong resonance between Bazin’s ontology of film and early classical film theory’s belief in cinema’s profound archaism. For luminary figures such as Jean Epstein, cinema is a form of ancient magical ritual, recreating “the enchantment by the uncanny double” through its phantasmagorical, photographic nature, its most fundamentally magical feat to “render lifelike what is, after all, merely light and shadow.” Following Philip Rosen’s interpretation of Bazin, Moore writes,

Cinematic representation depends on lack, on negation, on replacing the real entirely with a likeness to appear real. …The coexistence of the physically absent reality to which the image differs and defers and the presence of the film image fuel spectator desire. …The “gap” as Philip Rosen refers to it, “between referent and signifier” without which “Bazin’s ontology could not exist” is as much a part of cinema’s appeal for Bazin…as its indexicality. …“It is precisely this gap,” writes Rosen, “which is filled in by subjective projection as variable manifestations of human imagination.” …The film image can be seen as the spirit double of the real thing it shows, always independent of that thing, an exact copy that is thoroughly autonomous and exists as part of the spirit world that is cinema.

While Moore does not rigorously theorise the significance of presence and absence as such, her acuity to a more occult understanding of a Bazinian spirit-world is precisely the territory I wish to explore by foregrounding both Bazin’s attention to the ambiguity of presence, and its connection to the magical archaism of cinema, a connection which is readily overshadowed by both indexical and Christian interpretations of his work.

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15 Ibid., 84–85.
Indexicality

For Bazin, presence is an “ambiguous”, multivalent force in cinema, its first sense bound up in the processes of the medium’s autonomous, photographic nature: “All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.” Bazin understands that such absence leads to a very different order of presence within the image itself, one of revelation, where this lack of human subjectivity, intervention and artistic interpretation enables the object and its image to “share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint,” or “the molding of death masks… . One might consider photography… as a molding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light.” Through this process of luminous embalming, where a trace of the real remains strangely within the image, cinema satisfies “once and for all, and in its very essence, our obsession with realism.” These are the threads with which Bazin becomes aligned with the theory of indexicality, his seminal essay “Ontology” largely accepted as its archetypal document.

The index is one of the triad of signs developed by semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce, for whom the index, the icon and the symbol all function together as “a complex system of interlocking concepts that comprise not only a philosophy of signs but a theory of the mind and its relation to the world.” In Tom Gunning’s view, and in direct relation to Bazin’s thesis, “within theories of cinema… the index has been largely abstracted” from Peirce’s complex system, and “given a rather simple definition.” Its “simple definition” states that an existential bond exists between model and copy—between reality and cinema—by virtue of a kind of contact, where a trace, an impression, of the real remains in that which has been “impressed.” The index is most often exemplified in such things as “the footprint, the bullet hole, the sundial, the weathervane, and photographs—all signs based on direct physical connection between the sign and its referent.” Within this notion lies an intrinsic causality, where the impression is created by a tactile force that causes its existence. As Mary Ann

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18 Ibid., 13.
19 Ibid., 15.
20 Ibid., 12 nt.
21 Ibid., 12.
24 Ibid., 30.
25 Ibid., 30.
Doane states, “the work of the index depends upon association by contiguity (the foot touches the ground and leaves a trace, the wind pushes the weathercock, the pointing finger indicates an adjoining site, the light rays reflected from the object “touch” the film).”

Gunning believes that while this diminished concept of indexicality has given film theory some valuable insights into the nature of film and photography, its usefulness may have reached its limits, particularly in the age of digitality, and certainly within the field of animation. Gunning also goes to some length to show that such a reading of Bazin’s work is ultimately incongruent to Peirce’s system. While Peirce seeks to create a logic of signs based on rational processes, Bazin speaks of photographic realism as the “irrational power…to bear away our faith.” As Gunning argues, “[t]his “magical” understanding of photographic ontology is clearly very different from a logic of signs. In Peirce’s semiotics, the indexical relation falls entirely into the rational realm.” Daniel Morgan also argues that an indexical reading of Bazin’s ontology negates the profound depth of his enquiry, and stresses that the index be struck from Bazinian interpretations, for “[w]hat Bazin argues is something far stronger, more powerful, and, in some deep ways, stranger.” Indeed, the following passage reveals an undeniable incongruence with a consistent theory of indexicality:

The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted, or discolored, no matter how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it is the model.

Such “strangeness”, I think, emanates from, and surges through, the ambiguity of presence, which for Bazin is not only grounded in the absence of the artist, but in the charm of the medium—its magical illusions—to enigmatically dissolve the boundary between real presence and an otherworldly “re-presentation.”

27 Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 30–33.
28 Bazin, What is Cinema?, 14.
29 Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index,” 33.
30 Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin,” 448.
31 Bazin, What is Cinema?, 14.
Bazin’s Ambiguous Presence

Writing in 2008, not long after Moore, Morgan and Gunning, Dudley Andrew discovers a concrete connection between the ambiguous elements of “Ontology” and Sartre’s The Imaginary, through the interrelation of the archaic “fetish power of the image” and the imaginary processes of perception, where art’s magical power compels a feeling of faith and an impression of life, even in the actual absence of this life. Andrew argues that it is this Sartrean fusion of presence and absence, steeped in an archaic sensibility, which influences Bazin toward the ambiguous nature of cinema. For Andrew, this Sartrean influence provides a more legitimate foundation for Bazin’s “scandalous claim” to the identical sameness of presence and its cinematic re-presence, leading Andrew to recognise “two Bazins”:

On the one hand stands the sunny, textbook Bazin, for whom cinema reveals reality. This is the Bazin for whom films are the monstration of the world’s self-presentation, offering epiphanies to the vigilant. On the other hand, as has become increasingly evident, a darker Bazin prefigures several philosophers in the post-Sartrean French context right up to our own day (Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy, Rancière).

Most certainly in “Ontology”, this “darker Bazin” resurrects and legitimises Gorky’s own kingdom of shadows, where the “real” world and an uncanny other world seem to collapse into one another, the boundary between the real presence of the human figure and its cinematic re-presence becoming less certain. Most significantly, this problem of presence is equally a problem of time: here, Bazin marks the difference between the still photograph and the moving image through time’s varying degrees of intensity—the instant “now” of photographic stasis and the cinematic passage of duration—the latter a less “disturbing” proof of preservation:

Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost indecipherable…the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time…rescuing it simply from

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34 Andrew, “The Ontology of a Fetish,” 62.
35 Ibid., 62.
36 Ibid., 66.
its proper corruption. …the cinema is objectivity in time. …Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.37

In “Theatre and Cinema—Part Two,” Bazin further develops the ambiguity intrinsic to cinema’s “strangely paradoxical” presence, where reality’s forces of time and space collude.38 “Presence, naturally, is defined in terms of time and space.”39 Here, Bazin contends that cinema is the supreme challenge to the **living presence** of the **theatre actor**: as “a mirror”, cinema becomes an intermediary, opening a “middle stage between presence and absence” that hitherto has not been possible in the arts.40 This is the “gap” to which Rosen refers, the threshold between presence and absence, the in-between territory that proffers a very different kind of life-force, one which challenges absolute negation through its preservation of **time** as the ether of existence. For Bazin, this gap, or interval, invokes an archaic sensibility, fulfilling the basic human desire for the immortalisation of life against the unthinkable truth of death. That is, cinema satiates the primordial desire to preserve life through the ritualistic representation of this life,41 whereby the time of life itself is embalmed. In this way, the image of the human becomes both a real presence and its representation: it is the living, temporal body strangely immortalised, suspended in its luminous mould, enabling us to defy a “second spiritual death.”42

**Sacred Realism and Ancient Spirituality**

Steeped in such heady mystical overtones, it is not surprising that Bazin’s “Ontology” leads into fairly controversial theological territory, particularly when compared with his later writings. While the archive on indexicality exists outside of, or in oblique repudiation of, such spiritual realism, the premise that film—as this modern conduit for existential salvation—is somehow mediating a **sacred** threshold is not without its problems for a more aggressive atheistic sensibility. Kline criticises the contradictions strung amongst Bazin’s so-called essentialism as being “not merely a rhetoric device but a basic tenet of Bazin’s (Christian) existentialist beliefs.”43 As Cooper says, Bazin’s “profound belief in the soul of the world” and his “faith in the Platonic Idea” leads him “to see in cinema the revelation of

38 Ibid., 96–97.
39 Ibid., 96.
40 Ibid., 97.
41 Ibid., 10, 14–15.
42 Ibid., 9–10.
43 Kline, “The Film Theories of Bazin and Epstein,” 69.
the ‘universal soul’ ” and to take the “discussion of the soul into religious, specifically Catholic, terrain.” 44 While Cooper’s account of Bazin concentrates on later writings which clearly extoll the virtues of a Christian existential “phenomenology of salvation and grace”, 45 “Ontology” itself does not seem to me to be clearly authorising such stridently Platonic or Christian ideals. Certainly, Bazin advocates cinema as revelatory, where “the natural image of a world that we neither know nor can know” is given through film’s “power to lay bare the realities.” 46 And though Bazin does articulate cinema’s power to restore presence as an act of salvation against the inevitability of death, its mysticism is much older than Christian faith, aligning with archaic burial practices of mourning and consolation that pragmatically manage the very real human fear of becoming forgotten, practices that rely upon the ambiguity, rather than the certainty, of presence.

In tune with this anthropological urge to memorialise, Bazin’s essay is a meditation on the artistic act of preservation and its defiance of finitude through this new, cinematic rite of luminous embalming: as modernity’s incarnation of more ancient forms of mourning practice, cinema autonomously creates and preserves the silent spectre, whose liminal form defies the certitude of death. That he begins “Ontology” with an exposition on the rituals of ancient Egyptian embalming leaves no doubt to his fascination with the obsessive human desire to transcend the inevitability of death and decay:

The religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus, by providing a defence against the passage of time it satisfied a basic psychological need in man, for death is but the victory of time. To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life. 47

Through this restoration of the pre-Christian archaic, Bazin is able to conceptualise cinema as the supreme form of contempt, flouting as it does the finitude of death. While he does speak of faith, it is not through a dogmatic orthodoxy, his vision of art’s purpose fixed more broadly on the anthropological rather than the theological:

44 Cooper, The Soul of Film Theory, 9, 75–82.
45 Ibid., 78.
46 Bazin, What is Cinema?, 15.
Civilisation cannot…entirely cast out the bogy of time. …No-one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death. Today the making of images no longer shares an anthropocentric, utilitarian purpose, but of a larger concept, the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny. “How vain a thing is painting” if underneath…we do not discern man’s primitive need to have the last word in the argument with death by means of the form that endures.⁴⁸

While theology and indexicality—and their respective sacred and non-religious realisms—may well rewrite Bazin to their own advantage, perhaps what is written is not so much the indoctrinated proof of either, but the disturbance of the certainty of both. “Ontology” speaks to the epic continuum of an anthropological desiring for eternity through art, and in this sense, errs toward a belief in the luminous aura of cinematic technology, rather than orthodox religiosity. More-over, eternal desire moves across historical boundaries, rather than inhabiting Christianity alone. That this ambiguous cinematic presence channels the ancient, poetic ideal for the light of hope—for immortality—beyond monotheistic religion, suggests that such utopian consciousness is indeed, as Ernst Bloch believes, the lot of humanity, rather than the fanatic.⁴⁹ In this sense, Bazin presents cinema as a kind of non-Euclidean cosmological threshold for thinking the liminal spirit, for thinking a space between belief and desire: in this ambiguous threshold between indexicality and essentialism, the cinematic spirit wanders between this world and other imaginable worlds, between heaven and earth, between time and eternity.

Edgar Morin: The Fluid Universe

The original question which science snatched away from religion and philosophy in order to take it upon itself, the question which justifies its ambition as science: ‘What is man, what is the world, what is man in the world?’, science today sends back to philosophy, still incompetent in its eyes because of its addiction to speculation; and it sends it back to religion, still illusory in its eyes because of its inveterate mythomania.

—Edgar Morin⁵⁰

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⁴⁸ Bazin, What is Cinema?, 10.
Writing on cinema in Bazin’s own time, Edgar Morin’s mid-century work *The Cinema, Or the Imaginary Man* practices what he will later come to call his method of complex thought, which refuses to mutilate, reduce, simplify or hierarchically subordinate forces such as incertitude, chaos and liminality, and “which emphasizes the interaction between researcher and researched, and participation as a way of being in the world.”51 Beyond dualistic thought, and its “principles of disjunction, reduction, and abstraction” which Morin calls the “paradigm of simplification”, complexity entails

the disturbing traits of a mess, of the inextricable, of disorder, of ambiguity, of uncertainty. Hence the necessity for knowledge to put phenomena in order by repressing disorder, by pushing aside the uncertain. In other words, to select the elements of order and certainty, and to eliminate ambiguity, to clarify, distinguish, and hierarchize.52

Against the “light” of Cartesian Reason which has “driven myths and “darkness” to the dregs of the human spirit”,53 *Imaginary Man* is a work that prophecies this later thesis through an anthropological grounding which refuses to privilege life, *logos*, and reality before death, *mythos*, and the imaginary. For translator Lorraine Mortimer, Morin’s film theory is the natural extension of his earlier book, *L’Homme et la Mort*:

Morin’s refusal to reduce and mutilate, aspiring to truth and totality while recognizing that totality is impossible and uncertainty our lot…takes place in a context, is played out against a backdrop, which is dramatic itself. For all our incertitude, there is one certainty humans can count on: death. Resistance to the cruelty of the world is the most profound and primordial of resistances. … [Morin] needed to elaborate an ‘anthropo-social’ conception of two neglected aspects of anthropology that the problem of death threw into relief: the biological reality of the human being, mortal like all other living beings, and the human reality of myth and the imaginary, which posited a life beyond death.54

Drawing from his own experiences, Morin’s confrontation with the “theoretical and existential complexity” of death ultimately “meant abandoning the ideology of Christianity and western humanism that man is above nature and it meant recognizing the omnipresence

51 Mortimer, “We Are the Dance,” 77.
53 Ibid., 2.
of contradiction”.

To mark out such a terrain, Morin casts an extraordinarily wide interdisciplinary net, mixing the philosophical vitalism of Henri Bergson with Sartre’s existentialism, and interweaving anthropological staples such as Lévi-Strauss with the early classical film theory and criticism of such luminary figures as Epstein, Balázs, Gance, and Eisenstein, while re-animating the cinematographic magic of Méliès—“that great naïve Homer”—and the photogenic wonder of the Lumière’s banalities.

Undoubtedly, Morin traverses the same complex, liminal territory that Bazin’s “Ontology” more intuitively gropes through, so as to preserve the integrity of incertitude. While Bazin alludes more enigmatically to the liminality and paradox of cinema (leaving his work vulnerable to precisely those systems of mutilation that Morin condemns), such indeterminacy principally guides Morin’s method, so as to plunge deeply into the nature of the human mind and spirit, and our profound connection with cinema as an object of art, science, magic, and spiritual belief. Like Bazin, Morin is profoundly influenced by Sartre’s psychological processes, his attention to the problem of presence and absence as it relates to the difference between the imaginary and the real, and what this might mean for moving images and their magical presence.

Morin worries that words like myth, dreams, the imaginary, the poetic, metamorphosis and magic have no serious place in a world driven by science, empiricism, and sober rationality; they belong to a pre-modern, “pre-civilised” age, to the theologian, the Sharman and the prophet, to the anthropologist and the alchemist, to the fool, the child and the madman. And of course, the artist. Yet, as Mortimer explains, Morin’s “[t]rue rationality recognizes irrationality and dialogues with the unrationalizable”, and “is profoundly tolerant in regard to mysteries”:

One of the most potent truths in Morin’s book about death concerns the way we live: the human being inhabits the earth not just prosaically but poetically. Myth and the imaginary are not just superstructures, vapors. Human reality is itself semi-imaginary. Myth and the imaginary have a radical place in Morin’s complex anthropology, which never sees man principally defined by technique and reason. Homo sapiens and Homo faber are also Homo sapiens.

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56 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 49.
57 Ibid., 7–11.
demens et ludens. Affectivity and the “lived poetry of the surrealists” are at the heart of his anthropology. For Morin, the “charm” of cinema, with its restoration of a mythical universe, returns us to our true rationality, our poetic being in the world, our thinker-worker-madman-player self who creates and partakes in the complex circuit of “magic, sentiment, and reason” which is the “contradictory unity of the Gordian knot of all anthropology.” As the incomparable site mediating death’s finitude, cinema opens the space where the “substance of the imaginary is mixed up with our life of the soul, our affective reality.” In this unreservedly anthropological sense, Morin will theorise cinema as sating the mad desire for immortality and providing a defence against the unimaginable vanishing that lies ahead. As the “fluid universe” of an animistic, mystical order, as the surreal encounter of a luminous sleeping awake, a Morinian cinema enlivens us to our poetic, archaic self, emphasising process rather than essence. In its diaphanous theatre of shadows, cinema is our own dance with death, intimately communing with the primordial desire for immortality, a desire which links our mortality—and the inevitability of our own death—with the figure of the double itself.

Presence-Absence and the Archaic Double

[The cinema brings to the world a feeling, a faith, the “return to ancestral affinities of sensibility.” This is where the mystery begins… At the most archaic level, the kingdom of the dead is a universe of doubles that copies the universe of the living in every way. …The image represents—the word is right—it restores a presence.

—Edgar Morin.

For Morin, the forces of presence and absence—as forces of life and death—catalyse our subjective participation with cinema, restoring us to the complexity of a pre-civilised, pre-enlightened sensibility that modern thought tends to either neglect or reject. To elaborate the universe of cinematic presence as magical, Morin takes the Sartrean imaginary and its liminal casting of presence well beyond the ambiguity that Bazin outlines, commuting across an eclectic assemblage of images, all of which exude, in varying degrees, this uncanny aporia:

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58 Mortimer, introduction to The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, xvii.
59 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, xi.
60 Ibid., 207.
61 Ibid., 63–64.
62 Ibid., 8, 27, 171.
mental images in the mind’s eye (dreams, memories, hallucinations, ideas, prophetic visions), artistically created material images (drawings, engravings, painting, sculpture), and those images which present a more ephemeral degree of this existential liminality—the shadow, the silhouette, the mirror, the water reflection, the spirit, the spectre, the photograph, the *cinema*. Ultimately, Morin understands cinema’s place in this assemblage of images as belonging to a more distant genealogy that ‘begins’ with archaism, where magic, metamorphosis, mythical cosmologies, and the exaltation of the human spirit reigns. Sired from this line, cinema triumphanty restores “the *double*, the image-specter of man”, which is universal in archaic humanity… the single great universal human myth. An experienced myth: its presence, its existence leave no doubt. …This image is projected, alienated, objectivized to such a degree that it appears as an autonomous specter, endowed with an absolute reality...[which] is at the same time an absolute superreality: the double is the focal point of all the needs of the individual, as if they were realized there, especially his most madly subjective need: immortality.

Here, Morin is preparing the ground for the ways in which images possess, and are possessed by, two kinds of archaic, mythical death: “the survival of the double”, who is “other and superior” to its original form and moves “freely in the universe of metamorphoses”, and the process of “death-renaissance”, that is, of rebirth or reincarnation, which, like the double, is a “universal of archaic consciousness.” Shedding its decomposing body, the spectre is free to participate in the divine polyphony of continual metamorphoses:

Then, holding man’s *amortality*, it possesses a power so grandiose that death changes it to become a god. The dead are already gods and the gods are descended from the dead, that is, from our double, that is, from our shadow, *that is...from the projection of human individuality into an image that has become external to it.*

It is in this psychological, desiring sense that cinematic presence takes on its surreal, occult, and intuitive dimensions, where the magical quality of Epstein’s *photogénie* is central, imbuing the mundane life it captures with a poetic “quality that is not in life but in the image

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64 Morin, *The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man*, 25.
65 Ibid., 26, 53 and 72.
66 Ibid., 26.
of life”, where the revelatory, supernatural power of the cinema realises itself, where organic sight is doubled by “oneiric vision”, and where the real and the magical intersect. While keeping such phantasmagorical company as dreams, hallucinations, religion, magic, artworks and apparitions, cinema equally captures (embalms) and transforms the elemental forces of light, darkness, movement, space and the manifold intensities of time (stasis, acceleration and deceleration, temporal reversal, kaleidoscopic collages of the past, present and future, the sense of eternity in the restoration and preservation of presence),  

endowing the material world of the animate and inanimate with the peculiar je ne sais quoi of photogénie. More rigorously than Bazin, Morin speculates on the difference between photographic and cinematic impressions of life through this more mystical lens of light, motion and time, revealing the extent to which photogénie, as occult possessor of such omnipotent presence, also exudes the forces of absence: 

Although motionless, the photographic image is not dead…Yet they are not animated. … With the cinematograph, we could believe that the presence of the characters comes from the life—the movement—that is given to them. In photography, it is obviously presence that gives life. The primary and peculiar quality of photography is the presence of the person or the thing that is nevertheless absent….as if, to use Sartre’s words, the original had incarnated itself into the image. … Healers, sorcerers, and seers…treat and heal through photography…cast a spell or a charm; evil spells of bewitchment are performed on photographs…the photograph…is a real presence of the person represented…

For Morin then, photography practices a magic of morality which performs a very particular function as the immortalised memory: with its “virus of presence” which “knows no borders between life and death”,  

and as a medium of doubling, photography externalises the imaginary mind—the organic, temporal, perishable medium—whose function is to represent, that is, to restore a presence. If the “most banal of photographs harbors or summons a certain presence”,  

it is through its enigmatic doubling of our own inner ‘camera’ which has ever created the illusion of presence, yet which will inevitably perish. Returning again to Sartre’s “mental image” which, for Morin, is the reciprocal medium for both “the presence of the

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67 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 15–16.
69 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 17.
70 Ibid., 17, 20.
71 Ibid., 32–33.
72 Ibid., 17.
world in man [and] the presence of man in the world”, it is the permeations of absence, haunting the margins of the real, which allow presence to flourish:

But at the same time, the image is only a double, a reflection—that is, an absence. Sartre says that “the essential characteristic of the mental image is a certain way that the object has of being absent even in the midst of its presence.” Let us immediately add the converse: of being present even in the midst of its absence. As Sartre says, “The original incarnates itself, it enters the image.” The image is a lived presence and a real absence, a presence-absence.73

That cinema is this ungovernable expression of presence-absence, where the survival of the double and death-renaissance flourishes, means that it also possesses the divine forces of prophecy, in diabolical and radiant strains, now the bearer of a dreadful existential incertitude that haunts the finitude of death, now the glorious messenger of something utopian beyond such finitude:

Successive layers of beliefs have been superimposed and mixed in the double. From the time of Homeric Greece, the double has just as well, and even simultaneously, brought anguish or deliverance, victory over death or the victory of death. ... The mental image and the material image potentially enhance or debase the reality they present to our view; they radiate fatality or hope, nothingness or transcendence, amortality or death.74

The Morinian Soul

It is in such passages that the force of Morin’s complex thought announces itself, for what is ultimately at stake amidst this collusion of presence and absence, mental and material images, gods of the dead, nothingness and transcendence, is not only our anxiety toward absolute negation, but the unsettling residue of religiosity that comes with such utopian idealism. Like the ancient spiritual realism of Bazin’s “Ontology”, this same ambiguity of the imaginary immortal is haunted by the presence of the soul, a term which Morin will not condemn, negate, or evade, but entirely recast through the tenets of complex thought. Animism—understood as an encounter with archaism through the revelation of photogénie—is more than simply “subjective presence”, but something uncanny and “atmospheric”, a metaphorical soul:

73 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 23.
74 Ibid., 29.
Thus things, objects, nature, under the combined influence of rhythm, time, fluidity, camera movement, magnifications, games of shadow and light, gain a new quality. …This soul, of course, we must understand in a metaphorical sense, since it is a question of the state of the spectator’s soul. The life of objects is obviously not real: it is subjective. But an alienating force tends to extend and externalise the phenomenon of soul into an animistic phenomenon. Objects hoist themselves up between two lives, two levels of the same life: external animistic life and internal subjective life. There are in fact two meanings to the word soul, the magical (alienated) sense, where the soul is transferred onto the contemplated object, and the subjective sense, where it is experienced as internal emotion.75

This plural conception of soul is integral to Morin’s complex method, which opens out an alchemy of concepts, problems and relations, where the imaginary, participation, magic, animism, photogénie and cinema’s fluid metamorphosis of movement, time and space together create a cosmology “at the limit of materiality, visibility, and palpability, precisely at the border of a nature that is fluid, frothy, nebulous, gaseous, or aqueous.”76 Yet matter itself is not to be discarded, for Morin also demonstrates “a keen appreciation of the materiality of existence, of the concrete and the sensuous”, where the human body, as well as the soul, in both the spectator and the cinematic world, is thought in relation to the forces of time and motion. Incorporating Bergson’s notion of duration (where the psychological, qualitative feeling of subjective time opposes the metronomic, scientific precision of quantitative clock-time), Morin speaks of cinema’s “fluid time” in terms of degrees of mobile intensity, as being contingent upon motion’s “strange compressions and elongations”, where the “acceleration of time vivifies and spiritualises” while the “slowing down of time mortifies and materialises”,77 all of which activates the circuit of an all-encompassing affectivity:

Movement has a double face: it is not only a power of corporeal realism, but also an affective power, or kinaesthesis. It is so bound to biological experience that it brings with it the inner feeling of life as well as its external reality. Not only the body but also the soul. Not feeling alone, not reality alone: the feeling of reality.78

75 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 66.
76 Ibid., 65.
77 Ibid., 57–58.
78 Ibid., 130.
Morin runs the gamut of a potentially infinite score of “in-betweens”, which are themselves, continually in motion, flux and flow, and which charter the warp and weft of an immense poetics of incertitude. Between the self and cinema stretches a vast and burgeoning threshold unfolding the complex circuit of affective participation—projection, alienation, anthropocosmomorphism—the ungraspable totality of which summons the process, rather than the essence, of magic, all of which ultimately circulates around the relation between the time of life, the reality of death and an image “animated with a life more intense or more profound than reality…in possession of a supernatural life”:

Then a force as powerful as death radiates from it, sometimes a Proustian power of time recovered, sometimes a spiritualist power. It is as if in man the need that battles against the erosion of time fixes itself in a privileged manner upon the image.

In this alchemic reciprocity of the real and the imaginary, it is not only the cinematic double, but we ourselves, as spectator, who become itinerant vagrants wandering the threshold of a host of collapsing binary oppositions: between life and death, divine and earthly, human and cosmos, corporeal and spiritual, waking perception and oneiric surrealism, the self and an ‘other’ self, memory and prophecy, recollection and phantasy, “primitive” archaic and “civilised” modern thought. In this sense, Morin’s double, with its indefinable, multivalent presence, has a deeply anthropological function that resonates with Bazin’s own theory: through this aporetic figure, the finality of human life is outfoxed, the mad desire for immortality satiated. If Morin indicts the modern world’s saturation of cinema with an excess of soul—now “all slimy and lachrymal”, oozing, overflowing, “smeared with soul”—it is because we “moderns”—heirs to “evolution” and “civilisation”—confuse soul with magic, feeling with seeing. Morin is adamant to preserve, against the mutilating essentialist and dualistic definitions, the indeterminate nature of the soul, returning it to the disorder of process rather than the order of essence:

What is the soul? It is this imprecise zone of the psyche in its nascent state, in a state of transformation, this mental embryogenesis where all that is distinct is confounded, where all that is confounded is in the process of becoming distinct, in the midst of subjective

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79 Mortimer, introduction to The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, xxi.
80 Morin, The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man, 24.
81 Ibid., 25–27.
82 Ibid., 109–11.
participation. Let the reader who wears his soul on his sleeve forgive us. The soul is only a metaphor for us to designate unspecified needs, psychic processes in their nascent materiality or decadent residual state. Man does not have a soul. He has soul.\textsuperscript{83}

Furthermore, the problem for Morin is not humanity’s recurring creation of mythical realities and imaginary other worlds for the consolation of our existential incertitude: this is our basic human condition, our endlessly performed rite. The problem is that modern humanity no longer considers the genealogies of archaic magic—including the “imaginary reality of myth”\textsuperscript{84}—as spiritually meaningful, as a significant part of our participation with the cosmos. The problem is that The Soul, understood as essence rather than process, “degrades itself in exaggerating itself. It loses communication with the nourishing channels of the universe.”\textsuperscript{85} Not only have we confused the soul as something that can be known by mutilating its complexity, we have also lost touch with those creative conduits that enable us to live poetically. Again, this is cinema’s restorative purpose: not only does it respond to the “mad” utopian desire for eternal life, but to other needs and beliefs “that practical life cannot fulfil”: the “need to escape oneself…to lose oneself…to forget one’s limits, to better participate in the world”.\textsuperscript{86}

Morin’s anthropology is a unique response to the mutilating thought that surrounds him, one of his more radical claims being that in this disenchanted world, the modern invention of cinema exhumes and restores the archaic sensibility to live poetically with the dead—with those who are no longer lost to the corosions of time, organic memory and forgetting but are now cinematically eternalised—allowing us to participate meaningfully in the world. It is an idea that, decades later, Alan Cholodenko will later ‘re-animate’ to a much darker degree through a decisively different school of thought again.

\textsuperscript{83} Morin, \textit{The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man}, 108–9. 
\textsuperscript{84} Mortimer, introduction to \textit{The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man}, xxxiii. 
\textsuperscript{85} Morin, \textit{The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man}, 109. 
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 111–12.
The Animatic Spectre

The Kingdom of Shadows Gorky characterises is the Kingdom of shades, ghosts, spectres, evil spirits. This Kingdom is for me, Hades, the underworld, the land of the spirits of the dead, but of the dead who return to haunt the living as the living dead. This Kingdom, this empire of phantoms, is the Kingdom of Cinema. This Kingdom is ruled by Pluto…and by Satan. It is a land of the devil, of the evil demon.

—Alan Cholodenko

Writing from the 1990s, Cholodenko works out of the well-established post-structural continental school, privileging an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, and drawing principally from the aporias, in-betweens and undecidables of Derridean deconstruction and Baudrillardian post-structuralism. In the appeal to legitimise the theoretical significance of animation film against the tendency in “Film Studies” to privilege live action film, Cholodenko will take up Gorky’s “Kingdom of Shadows” directly, and place it within a composite that continually cycles back to the ancient senses of animation. This composite primarily includes concepts from Derrida’s thanatological complex (the crypt, the spectre, the trace, the “hauntological” and “lifedeath”), Freud’s work on the uncanny, mourning and melancholia, and Cholodenko’s own meticulous revision of ancient Latin and Greek etymology. Through this composite, Cholodenko rethinks the nature and experience of film through what he calls “the Cryptic Complex of the uncanny, the return of death as spectre, endless mourning and melancholia and cryptic incorporation.” Though Cholodenko does not cite a Morinian influence, the thanatological, mythological and conceptual components of Cholodenko’s mortuary complex do resonate as a kind of deconstructive echo to Morin’s archaic double. Yet even with its grounding in the aporetic space between life and death, Cholodenko’s theory is, I believe, a more radical “darkening” of cinema as the irresolvable, traumatic encounter with negation—death, absence, loss, evil, trauma—a Derridean darkening of the “light” of presence that marks the history of ideas.

89 Ibid., 9–11, 213.
91 Ibid., 10.
On Derrida and The Metaphysics of Presence

When Cholodenko forges a relation between Gorky’s “Kingdom of Shadows” and the archaic forces of animation, he does so by critiquing Gunning’s canonical “cinema of attractions” theory which is itself based on Gorky’s account, and which, for Cholodenko, unwittingly reveals the principally “animatic” nature of film. Yet it is in the relation forged between Gorky and Jacques Derrida that Cholodenko marks out the more rigorously conceptual terrain of animation, and where Gorky himself comes to prophecy Derridean thought.

Energising Cholodenko’s Cryptic Complex is Derrida’s critique of the anthropocentric, logocentric, phallocentric “metaphysics of presence”, with Derrida’s own work extending Heidegger’s earlier phenomenology. For Heidegger, “Being is determined as presence by time”, the idea of presence itself understood as the privileged force in both the temporal and the eternal sense. As Carol J. White explains, “Even the [Platonic] Forms and God are real in an eternal “now”… even the traditional characterisation of Being as temporal, timeless, or supratemporal is a particular metaphysical interpretation…” Following Heidegger, Derrida writes:

The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West…[determines] being as presence in all the senses of this word. It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated the constant of a presence—eidos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject), aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth.

For Derrida, the metaphysics closes out the significance of both absence and liminality; instead, the binary oppositions of presence and absence are thought through an

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95 White, “The Time of Being,” 147.
uncompromising, hierarchical system that privileges a higher ‘one’ before a lesser ‘other,’ resulting in the subordination and marginalization of the latter.\textsuperscript{97} For Cholodenko, this is precisely the system in which animation studies remains marginalised. It will be useful here to present Cholodenko’s own account of Derrida’s critique, to prepare a deeper appreciation for how it is that this same tendency endures not only in film studies, but also in film music theory:

For Derrida, Western metaphysics has determined Being as \textit{presence}, a fullness of living, meaning, truth, essence, ideality, etc., interiorizing and centring it against a lack, an absence, a deficiency of itself. Metaphysics does this through a set of binary oppositions which even today stand for what is self-evidently logical and true, including fullness/emptiness, essence/superfice, interior/exterior, subject/object, proper/improper, literal/figurative, good/bad, truth/falsity, reality/fiction, adult/child, male/female, serious/frivolous, health/disease, cure/poison, light/dark, animate/inanimate, speech/writing, etc. A hierarchization of these antinomies elevates the first term as belonging to presence and subordinates and excludes the second of each pair of opposites as a falling off from presence.\textsuperscript{98}

In this regard, Cholodenko understands the “Platonism of Film Studies” to be the continuation of the metaphysics of presence, the theoretical significance of animation film readily overshadowed by the discipline’s concentration on “‘photographed live action film’…either excluding [animation] by defining [it] as a form of graphic art unrelated to film or marginalizing it as an inferior, frivolous, merely mechanical form or appendage of film for children.”\textsuperscript{99} Ultimately, while Cholodenko’s theory of the \textit{animatic} (as opposed to the \textit{cinematic}) is intended to legitimise and proliferate animation studies, his premise is that “not only is animation a form of film, all film, including cinema by definition, is a form of animation”,\textsuperscript{100} animated by both life and death:

Put simply, the first, last and enduring attraction of cinema as form of animation as form of what we call the animatic is the uncanny reanimation of the dead as living dead, of what after Jacques Derrida we call lifedeath.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{97} Cholodenko, “Who Framed Roger Rabbit,” 211.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 213.
\textsuperscript{100} Cholodenko, “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix, Part II,” 9.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 9–10.
Here, Cholodenko returns us directly to a liminal casting of the human figure in film—to the figure of the spectre who disturbs and decentres the supremacy of the plenitude of life—whose “trace” is “the mark of the radical other”, an “undecidable” which, in Cholodenko’s theory of film, is animation itself.\(^{102}\) It is an argument which directly challenges both a belief in the soul, and where such pure presence resides beyond the threshold of death.

**The Soul and the Spectre**

In claiming a privileged place for animation film in the broader field of film theory, Cholodenko writes that the “two major ideas of animation—life, movement” raises “the most profound, complex and challenging questions of our culture, questions in the areas of being and becoming, time, space, motion, change—indeed life itself”, its proof given through the very definition of animation, which he sources from Webster’s Dictionary:

> animate…[<L. *animatus*, pp. of *animare*, to make alive, fill with breath < anima, air, soul].
> 1. to give life to; bring to life. 2. to make gay, energetic, or spirited. 3. to inspire. 4. to give motion to; put into action: as, the breeze *animated* the leaves. adj. 1. living; having life. 2. lively; vigorous; spirited. *SYN.*-animate implies a making alive or lively (an *animated* conversation) or an imparting of motion or activity (*animated* cartoons); … \(^{103}\)

Like Morin, Cholodenko understands that film, so endowed with both life and movement, “poses the very questions of life itself, of movement itself and their relation”, with cinema inhabiting the space between the archaic and the modern, the occult and the scientific:

> [W]here various forms of energy, animism, magic, *élan vital*, etc., catalyze or transform the inanimate into the animate, we will find animation as ‘endowing with motion’ engaged in some form or manner, be it transformation, metamorphosis, metaphor, acceleration, etc. …the inescapable implication of the modes of animating as endowing with life, authoring, creating, etc., given us by the creationist myths of religion, classical mythology, magic, the supernatural, etc., and the institutions and discourses which propound them—notably the arts and the humanities—with the modes of animating as endowing with motion proffered by science and technology over the centuries… \(^{104}\)

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\(^{103}\) Cholodenko, introduction to *The Illusion of Life*, 15.  
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 16.
Here, in this rendering of cinema as both modern invention and heir to an ancient world through the intersecting forces of animation, the alchemies of science, art, magic and religion once more trespass unswervingly into the controversial territory of the soul, a territory written into the very definition that Cholodenko provides. But we must not presume to interpret this essentialist meaning as Cholodenko’s ontology of film; we must not leap to the conclusion that if “all film is a form of animation”, and that because animation itself means “soul” (coming from the Latin anima), then the soul of cinema ‘is’ animation. If such an argument seems to be deeply paradoxical, it is because Cholodenko is theorising the paradox of animation’s essentialism:

I theorize the animatic as not only the very logics, processes, performance and performativity of animation but the very ‘essence’ of animation—the animation and animating of animation. The animatic—the very singularity of animation—is anterior and superior to animation. It subsumes animation, is its very condition of at once possibility and impossibility…The animatic is that nonessence enabling and at the same time disenabling animation as ‘essence’…

In this sense, to say that cinema has a soul in the orthodox, institutionalised, colloquial sense would negate the complexity of aporia, indeterminacy, decentering and disturbance that deconstruction seeks to make room for. To say that animation or the animatic is ‘the soul’ of cinema, would be to return to the hierarchical manoeuvres of the metaphysics in its most ideal sense, where such an inimitable presence not only pertains to the fullness of life, but to the transcendental realm of afterlife, the immortal body, and the eternal soul. As Cooper writes of the general poststructuralist disinclination to a thinking in terms of ‘core’ or ‘essence’, “To promote belief in the soul would re-introduce the very essentialism that theoretical argument was seeking to deconstruct, and would have been deemed regressive rather than progressive.” In keeping with Derrida’s deconstructive “cryptology” then, Cholodenko rethinks the very notion of an essence or ontology of film beyond the consolation of such certainty. He does this by returning to archaic Hades, and the lifedeath of the spectre, which is not only the privileged “figure of all figures” in film, but forms the ground for thinking itself:

105 Cholodenko, “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix Part I,” 15.
106 Cooper, The Soul of Film Theory, 2.
For Derrida, all analysis is enabled by the spectre, is itself a conjuring of the spectre. For him, the spectre is not of the order of ontology but of hauntology. He writes, ‘Ontology opposes it [hauntology] only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration’. Ontology wishes to conjure away the spectre that enables, conjures, it. The hauntological makes every concept a concept of the spectre and a spectre of the concept.\(^{107}\)

As with Bazin and Morin, the idea of preservation as it relates to the ambiguity of the spectre is paramount, and in this sense, cinema—as not only the uncanny refuge for the living dead, but as a spectre itself—is *the crypt* which, in its incorporation of melancholia, and in staving off the surety, resolution, or consolation which normal, healthy mourning processes afford, remains the province of *lifedeath*, where the spectre wanders transiently between the world of the dead and the feeling of the living:

> As spectre, the cinema is never not of the order of the living dead. It always returns from death, lives with death and returns to it, that is, always returns from, lives with and returns to the crypt. …The life of the spectre in and of the crypt, the life of the spectre in and of the crypt of cinema, is that of *lifedeath*, at once the life of death and the death of life, life and death inextricably coimplicated, haunted, cryptically incorporated, making it impossible to determine, reconcile, and resolve them—life and death—individually and jointly, even as they cryptically incorporate the world and the spectator—subject, and vice versa.\(^{108}\)

Like Morin, Cholodenko sees that the return to archaism is critical for exorcising the essentialist definition of the soul, yet rather than taking a ‘difference in kind’ approach, Cholodenko will take the etymological path. In returning to Homer, Cholodenko emphasises a crucial distinction between the soul as *psyché* and the spectre as *psuché*, both of which relate to animation. Here again, I feel a liberal quotation allows Cholodenko’s work to resonate more succinctly with the broader aims of deconstruction:

> While the word animation is rooted in Latin *anima*, it goes by another in Greek, whose significance for our argument cannot be overstated. The ‘equivalent’ for *anima* in Greek is *psuché*. *Psuché*, as Jean-Pierre Vernant tells us (Vernant, 1991, p. 186), is a form of *eidolon*.


\(^{108}\) Ibid., 102–3.
Eidolon in Greek means double. Psuché is the simulacral figure, the spectre, that leaves the body of the dead one to wander as flitting shade in Hades, which is, not insignificantly for us, Gorky’s Kingdom of Shadows, his (for us) Kingdom of Cinema, of Animation. … Here, at the ‘origin’ of animation, psuché as spectral simulacral eidolon animates, spectring and exorcising with its apparition—most notably—Plato’s reversal and ontologizing of the Homeric psuché as soul, inherited in the Latin anima (air, breath, soul, spirit, mind) and in the soul of Christianity. And in animation thought as ontological, that is, of the order of presence, essence, the Platonic psyche, the Latin anima, the soul of Christianity.¹⁰⁹

Such a distinction means, for Cholodenko, that as in Hades, so too in cinema—the soul and the spectre are not at all the same thing, in the same way that “ontology” differs from “hauntology,” and where the “cinematic” might be rethought as the “animatic.”

Arguably, one of the more revealing aspects of Cooper’s compendium on the soul in film theory is the way in which the liminal figure of film co-habits with other “immaterial” or psychical spaces of the self (such as the mind, the emotions, and the psyche) beneath the greater rubric of “soul”, of which presence—as the plenitude of life, animism, vitality, spirit, energy—is central. Equally central to these ideas are the ways in which the pre-Socratic, pre-Christian world generates this plurality. Cooper writes, “While classical scholarship suggests that the Homeric framework presents no unified concept of soul, ‘psyche’ and other notions all cluster in meaning around the concept of life-force.”¹¹⁰ Yet for Cholodenko, it is this very proclivity to privilege the presence of psyché as “life-force” that must be rethought, and rethought as lifedeach, as the animatic—the radically, irreducibly Other¹¹¹—which Gorky originally describes as uncanny, extraordinarily unique and complex, shocking, destabilising, and traumatic, an invocation of evil, “where vice alone is being encouraged and popularised.”¹¹²

For Cholodenko then, cinema’s kingdom of shadows returns us to the ‘origins’ of animation itself, to the undecidable, to the crypt of animism, and most emphatically, to aporetic modes of existence endowed with movement and life, through a spectre more demonic than Bazin’s

¹⁰⁹ Cholodenko, “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix, Part II,” 10–11. On eidolon, also see Morin, The Cinema, Or the Imaginary Man, 32.
¹¹⁰ Cooper, The Soul of Film Theory, 7.
¹¹¹ Cholodenko, “(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix, Part I,” 15.
¹¹² Gorky, “In the Kingdom of Shadows,” 6.
luminous shadows, and significantly silent regarding the potential for goodness that Morin believes in.

**Cinema, Death, Time and Eternity**

This is the sadness which adheres to all finite life…[a] sadness which, however, never attains actuality, but rather serves for the eternal joy of triumph. Thence the veil of sadness which is spread over all nature, the deep, unappeasable melancholy of all life.

—Friedrich Schelling

In introducing the archaic spirit through Bazin, Morin and Cholodenko, I have tried to frame the ontological liminality, ambiguity and paradox intrinsic to the cinematic human figure as the restoration of an *uncanny* presence, of which absence also loiters ambivalently, whereby presence—that which is ever placed above and before absence—is decentred and disturbed, deposed from its historically hierarchical, privileged position. This is not a figure that affirms life over and before death, nor one that negates life or death, but is both and neither at one and the same time; *between* life and death.

Crossing the boundaries of belief and desire, truth and illusion, this liminal spirit is of an entirely different order to that of reality, even as it is drawn from, returns to, and departs from reality. As such, the nature of reality is itself destabilised, because presence—reality’s catalyst and compass—cannot be quarantined or definitively enclosed. ‘Presence’ is now the dispossessed outcast, wandering ambivalently across the territories of temporal and eternal realms, through the affective forces of light, time, motion, space, darkness, stasis and silence. Within this, the concrete, physical world holds no privileged position over and above imaginary worlds, just as the divine can no longer truly overcome the earthly. There can be no ‘one’ that is privileged over a lesser ‘other’ because *both*, or rather, *all* realities are the ground of desire, however much we may privilege our consciousness, our sentience, and the life of the world over and beyond an ungraspable, unknowable afterlife, or however much we privilege the utopian realm of the transcendental absolute over and beyond the dystopian decay of the real world. These are the boundaries which the act of doubling disturbs, where the hierarchy of life and death can no longer be sustained. The double cannot be thought as a

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purely negative absence which requires the presence of something ‘deeper’ to restore its plenitude. Nor is it awarded the highest privilege of pure presence: it is an existential quandary, wandering in a no-man’s-land, moving ambivalently between worlds, between realities.

In this way, it is possible to say that the “presence-absence” or the “lifedeath” of the double creates or opens a space between time and eternity, thus overcoming, however momentarily, the fear of finitude. If, as Marciniak writes, death is the ground upon which all else stands, the utilitarian purpose of this figure could be thought, in response to such finality, as the provocation of an abundant, primordial curiosity toward the nature of existence. In constant communion with paradox and ambiguity, the cinematic spectre becomes the catalyst for reawakening the purpose of art in relation to the question of existence, and those irresolvable problems ever deemed ‘spiritual’: the time of the self, the inevitability of death, formations of belief, myths of immortality, the natural inclination for hope against the basic anxiety toward absence, with absence understood as pure negation, nothingness, annihilation, an abyss, a vanishing, forgetting and becoming forgotten. To preserve, to re-present, to restore; cinema creates a moving body of light and shade that is in alchemic negotiation with its future extinction, a body outstripping unimaginable loneliness, emptiness, and intolerable incertitude; a spiritual body that remains. As Robert Hunter writes: “In our art, in our religions, our cultures, our moral codes, our institutions, our architecture and design, we have found ways to let ourselves live on beyond the moment of our own individual extinction.”

The cinematic spectre fulfils this compulsion, liberating us from a total vanishing where, knowing we will die, we endlessly immortalise ourselves. Walter Benjamin speaks of memory as “the epic faculty par excellence” where the “idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death.” Following Morin, Françoise Dastur writes that we live not only with the living, but “with those who have gone before. …human life is a life ‘with’ the dead”:

[T]here is no culture except where a certain mastery over the irreversible flow of time is assured, and this implies the bringing into play of a multitude of techniques aimed at alleviating the pain of absence. And absence par excellence is the absence of the dead. They

disappear not momentarily, but absolutely and irreplaceably. This is why it is not illegitimate
to see in mourning, understood broadly as coming to terms with an absence, the origin of

As the simultaneous restoration of presence \textit{and} absence, the cinematic human figure—
understood as uncanny spectre, spirit, and double—not only reenergises the tendency to
ritualistically cast out an unthinkable nothingness, but becomes the concrete manifestation of
an imaginary, otherworldly space that has ever accompanied this tendency. As such, it is not
surprising that, from Gorky’s dark ruminations, film theories which preserve the spiritual
complexity of this mercurial figure—such as those by Bazin, Morin and Cholodenko—find
such plenitude in the connection between archaic belief and cinema’s visionary illusions of
life.

If Gorky’s kingdom awakens a spirituality ground in \textit{visions} of ambiguity, his reflections are
\textit{also} significant for their attention to an ‘image’ of eternal \textit{silence}, his lost symphony of life
anticipating, with ironic simplicity, a belief in \textit{music}’s purpose regarding cinema’s so-called
\textit{lacuna} of presence. If ineffable, instrumental, non-diegetic music becomes the unlikely
weapon that eliminates the existential ambiguity intrinsic to such silence, it is a problem that
theology will ironically rejoice in. With music ever affirmed, \textit{throughout western history}, as
the vehicle of mystical transcendence—as the bearer of essential, secret truths to human and
cosmic existence—this legacy of hierarchical essentialism enjoys a non-religious
reconfiguration in twentieth century aesthetics. As we shall now see, the privileging of
\textit{music’s humanisation} in film music theory follows a patently Platonic-Christian-Romantic
course, becoming the cognitive, emotive incarnation of a formerly divine presence of soul.

\textbf{Gorky’s Legacy in Musicology: The Argument for Presence}

In the discrete field of film music theory that also speaks to the question of cinematic realism,
the complex relation between musical meaning and the cinematic human figure is yet to be
theorised through a liminal framework, with similar ideals to those of film studies prevailing
to restore cinema’s spirit-reality to the living, corporeal, secularised world. Within this
archive, one argument in particular subsists to carefully erase the ambiguities of liminality, an
argument I should like to call—following its poststructural namesake, \textit{the metaphysics of}
presence—the argument for presence, where music’s invocation of ineffable feeling restores a plenitude and presence to the ‘lifeless’ cinematic spectre. Ultimately, in its reliance upon essentialism, this founding argument remains faithful to traditional Western binary thought, where music is privileged as the highest order of art through its transcendental allusions to the ineffable divine.

While this argument for presence is yet to be critiqued in film music theory, it enjoys enduring critical engagement in broader musicological circles. Continuing the Romantic effort to rethink enlightenment’s legacies, Vladimir Jankélévitch and Marcel Cobussen theorise the ontological and ethical significance of music beyond anthropocentric, logocentric thought, focusing on the ineffable, unsayable meaning of music, so as to rethink the meaning of spirituality itself. As we shall soon see, Jankélévitch and Cobussen respond diversely to, and parry with, such problems as the aura of secrecy between music and spirituality, the metaphysics of music as it relates to cosmological and anthropomorphic meanings, the persistence of rationalistic thought, and mythology’s continued relevance for theorising ‘the spiritual’, allowing the colloquial and institutionalised definition of spirituality itself to be reimagined. Like the archive of liminal film theory, such theories of music, I suggest, present equally rich possibilities for theorising spiritual complexity through this emphasis on liminal modes. In another way, as part of the ether or aura of mystery intrinsic to both artforms, such modes as the ineffable and the uncanny allow us to engage conceptually and creatively with the existential ambiguity and paradox that accompanies the charm of both the cinematic human figure and musical meaning. For it is through such modes that an otherwise unthinkable space between archaic, Christian and atheist belief systems becomes possible.

Ultimately, for us to locate this ambiguous space, one continuing premise requires intervention: the idea that music “means” the fullness of presence, and that this “inner” presence is the remedy which restores a plenitude of life to the silent spectre. In the following section, I comprehensively address those examples from film music scholarship that re-rehearse the tendency to hierarchically resolve the liminality intrinsic to this figure, a tendency which, by necessity, cannot engage liminal thought as a method, not merely as it relates to the music-cinema encounter, but as it also relates to more complex theories of (spiritual) existence where incertitude thrives. Such incertitude, I suggest, provides a concrete foundation for critically engaging with both the difference between liminality and absence, and the ironic, ongoing tendency to privilege human presence. For now, let us see how the
argument for presence not only erases the liminality intrinsic to the uncanny spectre, but reconfigures its identity to mean pure absence, lack, and emptiness, whereby death itself is mastered, not so much through music’s restorative powers of life, but through a logos which also, ironically, longs for a kind of Christian immortality.

**Music, Silence and the Ineffable: Eliminating Spectrality**

[T]here is something uncanny about any movement that is perfectly silent. It would be even more uncanny for several hundred people to sit together in a hall in absolute silence for hours on end. It is striking that it is only the absence of music that attracts our attention; its presence passes without notice.

—Béla Balázs

It has been said often enough now—the cinematic spectre was never entirely alone; as Morin alludes, from its beginning, cinema “bathes” in music’s affective presence, opening the circuit between “the soul’s exaltation” and “cosmic participation.” That film theory has “neglected” to properly account for the presence of music, particularly in terms of cinema’s verisimilitude to reality, has also been well noted. What is yet to be more thoroughly addressed is the way in which presence—as it relates directly to the silent spectre—endures as the catalyst for arguing such authenticity, and how the relation between the two might be rethought beyond hierarchical binary orders. To do so however, requires the disruption of the metaphysics of presence from the point of view of those music philosophers who, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, seek to preserve the complexity and incertitude of musical meaning. In the same way that our liminal film theorists challenge and pursue the spiritual ambiguities of the cinematic human figure, Jankélévitch and Cobussen also challenge ontological and ethical dilemmas in musicology. Before broaching their

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121 Jankélévitch and Cobussen share an affinity with certain other music philosophers of the twentieth and twenty-first century who challenge the relation between music and meaning, and the interconnected problem of representation, by rethinking the complexity of affective experience. Here I think immediately of Susanne Langer’s focus on the link between music, Bergsonian time and the ineffable in *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), Jean-Luc Nancy’s discussion on presence and absence in *Listening*, transl. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), and more broadly, the increasing presence of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of becoming in music studies: see, for example, ed. Ian Buchanan, Marcel Swiboda, *Deleuze and Music*, *Deleuze Connections* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Edward Campbell, *Music after Deleuze*, *Deleuzian Encounters*
respective critiques on the historical systems of belief that have come to define music’s spiritual course, I begin with the negation of silence, and the leverage this provides for the relatively late establishment of the film music discipline.

Silence: The Malady of Absence and the Musical Cure

People are never comfortable with the unknown which is where fear can breed freely.

—Vwadek P. Marciniak

There is a world of difference between mute dialogue and the music of silence.

—Germaine Dulac

In musicological contributions to the paradigm of cinematic realism, early accounts of film criticism which register the unsettling aspects of silence, such as Gorky’s, are foundational to the legitimisation of the film music theory discipline. Here, the connection between cinematic silence and absence (as death) leads musicologists to argue a gaping abyss within the binary structure of music and image, one that, I suggest, ironically mirrors the binary-ordered reality of inner essence and outer appearance. In this sense, silence is broached as a kind of mortuary malady, as the fatal negation of the plenitude of life, with the cure of music’s sentient presence restoring such plenitude. As Losseff and Doctor argue, the traditionally conservative field of musicology is yet to embrace the ineffable threshold between music and silence as a spiritually-complex encounter beyond the enculturated negative association of silence, for fear of “wandering into realms of the personal and spiritual that may embarrass many who protect as paramount ‘objectivity’ in the discipline”:

(London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); ed. Sally Macarthur, Judy Lochhead and Jennifer Shaw, Music’s Immanent Future: The Deleuzian Turn in Music Studies (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016). Certainly, these works resonate beautifully with the themes of this thesis, and given the space, would offer rich possibilities for further developing the theory of spiritual complexity. Notably, Langer, Nancy and Deleuze all enjoy an established presence in music studies. As such, and due to the limitations of this thesis, I remain focused on the works of Jankéliévitch and Cobussen, both of which are now attracting critical attention in the English-speaking literature: while Jankéliévitch has a venerated presence in European scholarship, his work is relatively new to the English-speaking sector; on the other hand, Cobussen is a contemporary scholar whose less orthodox, creative approach to theorising the relation between music and spirituality is yet to enjoy a wider readership within the musicological community. For recent discussion on Jankéliévitch, see Gallope and Kane, “Colloquy: Vladimir Jankéliévitch’s Philosophy of Music”; and Gallope, Deep Refrains; for further discussion on Cobussen, see reviews by Peter Atkins in Psychology of Music 37, no. 4 (2009): 494–498; and Robert Sholl in Music and Letters 93, no. 1 (2012): 90–93.

122 Marciniak, Towards a History of Consciousness, 47.
The unsaid and the unsayable—and undifferentiated time—gape before us. Dictionary definitions of silence privilege its negative qualities: absence of sound, prohibition on speech, refusal to communicate. These negative characteristics reflect a rather narrow European perspective, where silence is too easily equated with the passive, the submissive and the void.\textsuperscript{124}

As I hope to show, this negation of silence provides a solid grounding for film music theory, where the ambiguity intrinsic to the spectre undergoes a radical reorganization through the metaphysics of presence, with music’s intimate communion with human emotion given ontological primacy. Bound by its logocentric, anthropocentric rule, the argument for presence preserves the intuited belief that music, as the ineffable artform par excellence, means something intangibly “deep”, speaks something significant, that music is (Romantically speaking) the universal language of emotions even while such meaning refuses definite disclosure.\textsuperscript{125} Music fills the negative void of silence with feeling. This is the bedrock of emotionally-oriented discourse on non-diegetic, instrumental film music in Hollywood’s classical narrative film style in particular: as the animating essence which transforms liminality into the plenitude of life, and therefore cures the malady of death, music viscerally expresses, communicates, speaks, means, embodies, reveals an emotional depth otherwise unknowable, imperceptible, unexpressed, in the cinematic image and/or narrative alone. Necessarily then, the spectre’s forces of presence and absence become polarised, their original ambiguity entirely rerouted to enthrone music as a kind of atheistic saviour, resurrecting, once more, however unwittingly, the soul which endows the body with life.

If film musicology has a binding attachment to such ideals, it is in no small way influenced by the fact that this argument is primarily responsible for the foundation of the discipline itself. When music critics, composers, historians, and theoretists discuss music’s role in relation to the silent spectre, testimonies like Gorky’s carry enormous weight in affirming music’s privileged presence as the restorative force of life, plenitude, and wholeness. Certainly, while film music scholarship today may be appreciated as an eclectic, and necessarily interdisciplinary domain, it is a field that only becomes legitimised in the late 1980s by rerouting earlier discourses through methodologies of contemporary cultural theory.\textsuperscript{126} Such

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  \item \textsuperscript{125} Laird Addis, \textit{Of Mind and Music} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 5–7.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} See Stilwell, “Music in Films,” 19–61.
\end{itemize}
legitimacy also begins by locating film theory’s failure to address the presence of music against the centrality of the omnipotent image, using phrases such as “visual bias”, the “ideology” of the eye and the “tyranny of the image”. Writing in the early 1990s, Caryl Flinn critiques the enduring hierarchical relation between the eye/image/sight and the ear/music/sound, and the difficulties such a tendency poses for theorising the relation between the image and the score:

Sound has thus come to function as sight’s lesser counterpart, performing the role of an irrational, emotional “other” to the rational and epistemologically treasured visual term. Although film theory is increasingly cognizant of this idea, it does not always move beyond it. Consider the following insights by Mary Ann Doane:

The ineffable, intangible quality of sound—its lack of concreteness which is conducive to an ideology of empiricism—requires that it be placed on the side of the emotional or the intuitive. If the ideology of the visible demands that the [film] spectator understand the image as a truthful representation of reality, the ideology of the audible demands that there exist simultaneously a different truth and another order of reality for the subject to grasp.

The opportunity for musicologists then, lies in the exploitation of music’s relation to this ‘other’ order of reality, resulting in the inversion of this visual supremacy and musical neglect through such powerful theoretical systems as Marxism, psychoanalysis, and gender studies. Overturning this “visual chauvinism”, the discipline of film music theory is founded through arguments which secure music’s “deeper” truth, yet in so doing, performs its own acts of violence, not merely through the mutilation of silence, the spectre and music’s complexity, but through the reductive modification of originally complex criticism and theory. While the following quotations may seem excessive, I feel them necessary to trace the certain erasure that cinema’s liminal spirit undergoes through the negative framing of both silence and sepia imagery. I begin with Eisler and Adorno’s oft-quoted passage which

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suggests the mystical forces of both spectre and music, and which is later recast in Claudia Gorbman’s pioneering theory of music in narrative film:

The pure cinema must have had a ghostly effect like that of the shadow play—shadows and ghosts have always been associated. The magic function of music...probably consisted in appeasing the evil spirits unconsciously dreaded. Music was introduced as a kind of antidote against the picture. The need was felt to spare the spectator the unpleasantness involved in effigies of living, acting, and even speaking persons, who were at the same time silent. The fact that they are living, and nonliving at the same time is what constitutes their ghostly character, and music was introduced not to supply them with the life they lacked...but to exorcise fear or help the spectator absorb the shock.\textsuperscript{130}

To which Gorbman responds:

[Eisler and Adorno write] that sound, in the form of music, gave back to those “dead” photographic images some of the life they lost in the process of mechanical reproduction. Words such as three-dimensionality, immediacy, reality, and, of course, life, recur throughout film music criticism in its attempt to describe the effect and purpose of film music...earlier critics described the film image as dead, empty, or unnatural, and saw music as providing life, immediacy, or a magical antidote to cinema’s ghostliness...[Christian] Metz characterises the film image as signifying the “presence of an absence,” being only the representation of what was present, not the thing itself. This absence or lack has something to do with what London, Eisler/Adorno, and others call flatness, emptiness, ghostliness.\textsuperscript{131}

For Flinn, this silence is the pure negation of human presence, and so the death of inner feeling, a death which the mechanistic, visual medium of cinema imposes and which only the anthropomorphic forces of music can revive:

But just as music is classically said to enhance cinematic verisimilitude...so too is it said to bestow “a human touch” upon the cinematic apparatus, something that the apparatus intrinsically “lacks” due to its technological basis. ...And, due to its widely understood


\textsuperscript{131} Gorbman, \textit{Unheard Melodies}, 39.
connection—via late nineteenth-century romanticism—to emotional expression more generally, music has been associated all the more with the sense of human feeling. In these ways, music appears to offer the apparatus a means of rounding itself out, of adding a human dimension to its technological base, of imposing upon it the stamp of subjectivity. …

“Unaccompanied film images,” [Charles Berg] writes, “were described in negative contexts as ‘noiseless fleeting shadows,’ ‘cold and bare,’ ‘ghastly shadows,’ ‘lifeless and colourless,’ ‘unearthly and flat.’ Whereas Berg identifies all of this as a discomforting “silence” of the early cinema, I think it even more convincingly testifies to the fundamental lack of human presence and liveliness critics associated with early cinema. Each of the words he selects described death or some form of barren condition… . The metaphors of lack and lacunae that organise these critical discussions reveal a deeper preoccupation with losses of other kinds, particularly when associated—as they so frequently are—with the human body.132

This last, by Lawrence Kramer, appears in the 2013 Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies, the volume itself testament to film music theory’s long-awaited arrival within the academy:

[T]he cinematic body requires music to constitute it. …the cinematic image of the body is spectral, and its spectrality persists even once the primitive state of the medium has been left behind. … In order to flesh out the spectral image, the image must be joined to a vibratory depth, and to do that the cinematic image must be combined with music. …The body is a vibratory depth; its depth is where music vibrates; to add music to the primitive cinematic image is literally, not metaphorically but literally, to give the image a body. …To make them living images, as opposed to the disturbingly undead, music must supply its sensorial dimension to the bodily image as form or figure.133

In claiming the value, meaning, and identity of music in the cinema, the continued reliance upon this hierarchical binary opposition recasts the complexity of the spectre as pure negation because of the silence music directly overcomes. Dead, lifeless, lacking inner depth, suffering a loss of vitality, sentience and substance through its objective mechanical reproduction, the spectre is marked as the diminished other to its real-life model. Through music’s animating forces, the originally liminal nature of this figure is quietly annihilated. In Flinn’s critique, the meaning of music cycles around an intuited essence of human feeling and its historically

132 Flinn, Strains of Utopia, 42 and 45.
omnipotent role as the supreme animator of feeling, with music’s grave moral purpose the salvation and resurrection of life. In Gorbman, Metz’s reductive borrowing of Morin’s “presence of an absence” is stripped of its original, paradoxical complexity; instead, presence and absence are reconfigured as dualistic signifiers of a hierarchical whole which, so resolved, satiates the desire for reality’s more consoling unity and familiarity. The invocation of an undeniable hierarchy is equally potent in Kramer’s rendition, where music “gives the image a body”. Here, across each of these accounts, it is not the affective presence of luminous motion and time that evokes the impression of life and reality, but music’s auditory, vibratory source that eradicates the traces of melancholic loss.

Ultimately, such musical discussions rely upon a recalcitrant anthropocentric reasoning which, as we saw for film theory, also has deep historical, cultural roots for the image. With the wholeness of existence securely restored through this humanised presence of music, with the consolation of the sounding world placed over and above the disquieting uncertainty of the optical kingdom of shadows, the metaphysics of presence reduces silence to the category of emptiness, negation, and nothingness that ‘is’ death. It is precisely the kind of thinking that, following Derrida, Cobussen describes as

a struggle for mastery in which an entity asserts itself by reacting against ‘the other,’ thereby enclosing itself within the secure “solitude of solidity and self-identity” (Derrida: 1978: 91). Everything is what it is, the outside is out and the inside in. After all, that is how identity could be defined: the condition or fact that a thing is itself and not something else.

For Cobussen, silence has a very different kind of spiritual meaningfulness, thought instead as music’s condition of possibility rather than the mark of pure negation. Comparatively, film music theory’s argument for presence refuses such possibility, its musical ‘cure’ recentring and restabilising its boundaries of identity against the greatest human fear: death, certainly, but then within death, the unthinkable horror of eternal limbo, the eradication of which results, ironically, in the atheistic resurrection of the soul. In this regard, we might appreciate a very particular silence called for by Jankélévitch, who argues that, throughout history, it is the charm of music’s ineffability that ironically provokes an irresistible speaking

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134 Metz, Film Language, 5–7.
135 Cobussen, Thresholds, 32.
136 Ibid., 109.
of the deepest musical meanings imaginable, meanings which turn upon the ‘origin’ of creation itself, thus refusing the affirmation of genuine mystery and the incertitude of unknowing intrinsic to the life of time.

**Vladimir Jankélévitch: Music, the Ineffable and Plato’s Sickness**

*Music is no cipher; it is not awaiting the decoder.* Musical works do not express emotion or reflect optical phenomena, nor do they tell stories, nor represent ideologies…Music has a power over our bodies and minds wildly disproportionate to its lack of obvious or concrete meaning, as to its slippery aesthetic status. Nonetheless, music in general, musical devices and processes, and specific musical works in particular, are always bound to the “world down here below,” to a human experience of time, to human bodies and human spirituality, to culture and to past.

——Carolyn Abbate

In petitioning music’s identity as the “magical antidote” to cinema’s darker forces through its supreme animation of emotion in both the spectre and the spectator, film music theory’s “deep” relation to music is, I suggest, the natural continuation of a long history of theorising quintessential meanings through the metaphysics of music, of equating its affective forces with a human essence and morality, within which, for Platonic and Christian thought, the idea of an immortal, enlightened soul is central:

Music is a moral law. It gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, a charm to sadness, and life to everything. It is the essence of order, and leads to all that is good, just and beautiful, of which it is the invisible, but nevertheless dazzling, passionate, and eternal form.

Throughout the history of ideas, music bears this timeless reverence, role and responsibility, this incomparable, transcendental mystique, a mystique often spoken, within the metaphysics of music, through the gauze of what Jankélévitch will call “a metaphorical psychology of


desire”, a desire which begins its intellectual pursuit for divining music’s secret hidden meanings through this anthropocentric connection between the highest order of the human and the highest order of the cosmos, that is, through the name of the soul:

Throughout history, those human beings who are fond of allegory have sought that which is signified by music beyond the sound phenomenon...(the invisible harmony is more powerful than the visible). For there is an invisible and inaudible harmony, suprasensible and supra-audible…. Music is of another realm. …It is the metaphysician, and not the musician, who disparages actual physical harmony for the sake of transcendental paradigms and supernatural music…. Music “created the world” says Alexander Blok…it is the essence of the spiritual body, of the flow of thought…It is critical to point out, however, that all such metamusic, music thus romanticized, is at once arbitrary and metaphorical. It is arbitrary because one cannot see exactly what justifies taking the acoustic universe and privileging and promoting it to this degree above all others.\textsuperscript{139}

If Jankélévitch renounces such transcendental paradigms, potent metaphorical meanings and an acoustically-privileged universe, it is because music’s meaning is ineffable, that is, music is not of the logoscentric order of gnostic Saying that has come to define the practice of hermeneutic interpretation, but of the order of drastic Doing.\textsuperscript{140} Through poetic acts of listening, composing and playing, music is a process of becoming, an affective encounter with music’s transformational “Charm”, rather than the carrier of a secret, divine essence that allows the intelligible realm of ideas to master the sensible world of bodies.\textsuperscript{141}

Deeply influenced by Henri Bergson, Jankélévitch aims to differentiate between a metaphysics of music and its subjective temporal experience, and to do so beyond the prolific tendency to humanise music. Ultimately, rethinking the musicological desire to siphon ideas, images, emotions, or stories from a space somewhere within the depths of music necessarily begins by dismantling the dialogues of Plato, with special attention to the connection between philosophical idealism, music and morality, of which the rational, truth-seeking soul is central.\textsuperscript{142} For Plato, music’s purpose carries a great moral burden: through the goodness it gives to the soul, through its apothecary purpose to care for the soul, music makes a more

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 77–79.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 3–9.
‘holy’ human, the soul itself being “the authentic interlocutor of music.”¹⁴³ That music may “touch and condition the psyche”, means that it works to philosophically “cure” the soul of the perils that the passive, impressionable body presents.¹⁴⁴ As Francesco Pelosi writes, “philosophy makes use of music to take care of the soul, but this occurs while (and because) the soul is bound to a body. …for Plato, music is not only useful, but dangerous. The particular ways in which music addresses the body and psyche are also sources of disquiet and apprehension.”¹⁴⁵ When Dastur suggests that there is an intimate affinity between death and philosophy, it is because “both result in the disconnection of the soul from the body. In [Plato’s] Phaedo, therefore, one encounters the idea that thinking and philosophizing are a metaphorical death because they assume a separation from the corruptible nature of the body and an exit from time into the intemporality of the idea.”¹⁴⁶ To practice philosophy correctly is to prepare oneself for death, to spend one’s life practicing soul-body separation, with this care already granting the philosopher a certain degree of immortality. If music gives “wings to the mind”, it is because it is a music that inspires and compels this separation through an austerity and reserve that will not mar the beauty of truth with the melancholy of corporeal suffering.

Jankélévitch’s spiritual relation to music is nothing if not complex, his own conception of the soul coming remarkably close to that of Morin’s for the cinema: embracing aporia, Jankélévitch does not jettison the soul, but understands it as an enigma in the transformational flux of life, as a process of becoming, whose place within the psychophysiological sphere is ambivalent, wandering beyond the grasp of language while paradoxically calling language up; if the soul is ‘like’ music at all, it is because of such indeterminacies, with the ambiguity of presence and absence pervading its field:

Soul, thought, life, and individual presence are inherent in the existence of a body in general—and nonetheless the soul cannot be pinpointed here nor there in the body: the soul is not localizable, but more a diffuse presence… The soul, which exudes carnal presence in general like a perfume and nonetheless evades all topographies, the fugitive, ambiguous soul: is it not a kind of Charm? The soul is the Charm engendered by the body. This ubiquity, this everywhere and nowhere exclusive of a somewhere, this omnipresent presence that is at the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 6–7.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Dastur, Death, 21.
same time omniabsence, also characterises the present absence of meaning in a sentence, and of the Charm in music.\textsuperscript{147}

Certainly, such declarations become clearer when their purpose is reinforced. Jankélévitch writes that Plato is preoccupied “with moral education and with frugality, [railing] only against the “Carian muse,” the muse of those who weep and of effeminate sobs.”\textsuperscript{148} Plato does so, because, for him, music is the bearer of both virtue and vice: for music to possess a moral function, explains Jankélévitch, “it would seem necessary to amputate and discard all its pathos, everything heady and orgiastic in it…to deprive oneself of poetic intoxication in any form.”\textsuperscript{149} “The purpose of the severe Muse, the serious Muse, is to induce virtue and not enchant us by singing”.\textsuperscript{150} For Plato, a music that is too flamboyant, too ecstatic, too expressive, is a song of bacchanal trickery and dark causality, a bewitchment of the body’s sensual proclivities, contaminating the ruling, logical part of the soul, the higher, thinking part that loves and longs for immortal truth. To yield to the musical Charm, interprets Jankélévitch, is to submit to the Siren, the seducer of sailors, to submit to madness, suffering, and death:

Plato thinks that the power to drive onlookers mad should not be left to any random flutist; that the musician, like the orator, plays with dangerous forms of enchantment; and that the state should regulate the use of musical influences and contain them within a framework of sound medicine. That which is “musical,” however, is not the voice of the Sirens but rather Orpheus’s songs. The mermaid sirens, enemies of the Muses, have only one goal: to reroute, mislead, and delay Odysseus. In other words, they derail the dialect, the law of the itinerary that leads our mind to duty and truth. … To avoid seduction, what can one do besides make oneself deaf to all melody and suppress, along with temptation, sensation itself?\textsuperscript{151}

Here Jankélévitch underscores the ways in which Plato’s populace might be better controlled through a spiritually-edifying music, a role that music seems destined to perform with the creation of God. Jankélévitch however, is more concerned with how this particular belief in a music stripped of all “orgiastic” splendour influences thought toward a sterile asceticism devoid of true mystery: in pursuing serenity, wisdom and virtue, the musical \textit{thinker} must

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\textsuperscript{147} Jankélévitch, \textit{Music and the Ineffable}, 52–53.\\
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 6. See Plato, \textit{Laws} VII, 800e.\\
\textsuperscript{149} Jankélévitch, \textit{Music and the Ineffable}, 9.\\
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 7.\\
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 3. See Plato, \textit{The Republic} 398–403.
\end{flushright}
make exiles of all the inner “others”, such as the inner madman, child and artist described by Morin. In making oneself deaf to sensation, in becoming immune to the affective Charm of music, one is able to locate music’s innermost truth, “the place where music is hiding its messages.” Such a truth not only saves us from the petrifying sorcery of a ruinous, annihilating music, but enables us to conquer the fear of death itself through our transcendence of feeling. For the cure, thinks Plato, one must be anaesthetised. Thus, if Jankélévitch makes the following distinction between the ineffable and the untellable through the reciprocal distinctions of life and death, and enchantment and bewitchment, it is to explain us to ourselves, so as to overthrow this Platonic legacy of a life ever in combat with both its mortality and the eternal life that the musical preparation for death secures through its allusive utopian promise:

[T]he mystery transmitted to us by music is not death’s sterilising inexplicability but the fertile inexplicability of life, freedom, or love. In brief, the musical mystery is not “what cannot be spoken of,” the untellable, but the ineffable. ... If the untellable, petrifying, all-poetic impulse induces something similar to a hypnotic trance, then the ineffable, thanks to its properties of fecundity and inspiration, acts like a form of enchantment: it differs from the untellable as much as enchantment differs from bewitchment. Ineffability provokes bewilderment, which, like Socrates’s quandary, is a fertile aporia. … Among the promises made by ineffability is hope of a vast future that has been given to us.

Dastur also reminds us that for Plato, the fear of death is not only mastered by reason, but also through belief, and “whoever sets out to experience thinking in dying to his body (sic) discovers the immortality and indestructibility of the soul in this very exercise. …eternal life itself is born.” In contrast, Jankélévitch offers us a new thought for our own Platonic processes of enchanted moralization: if the ineffable presence of music causes us to speak so easily of music’s sentient essence, it is less because music communes with the dead and an eternal spiritual life, and more because it resonates with all the fertility, possibility, urgency and mystery of temporal life.

Film music theory’s argument for presence would seem then, in its own leap to rational thought, to openly assert the Platonic malady, with the presence of music now annihilating

152 Jankélévitch, Music and the Ineffable, 51.
153 Ibid., 71–72.
154 Dastur, Death, 21–22.
the existential incertitude of the silent spectre: in refusing an engagement with ‘spirituality’ of any kind through its decisively non-religious turn, the attributes of life, rather than afterlife, are privileged over both finitude and liminality, thus establishing an atheistic, rationalist essentialism. This Saying of “inner truth”, the mark of *logos*, overcomes more than the unsettling disturbances of silent film’s infirmary and its spectral maladies, but the musical aporia as well. With the duty of resurrection now its primary purpose, and with the moral polarities of good and evil reaffirmed through, respectively, music (soul) and image (body), music becomes immortal, and so beyond the reach of melancholy, suffering and the fear of death: not only does it cure and care for the soul, music *creates* a soul when before there was none. While Jankélévitch himself speaks of music’s recourse to life, rather than death, we must not presume that he is in some way reinforcing (rather than problematizing, as I have tried to show) the film music theory that argues music’s resurrection of life. The argument for presence validates *logos*, categorical truth, unity, order, essence, certainty, depth and spatiality through its hierarchical binary structure, the totality of which Jankélévitch refuses to privilege for the violence it does to the affirmation of music as an ineffable force of time, feeling, and becoming.

While situating the argument for presence within the Platonic tradition allows us to see the resilient persistence of essentialism in the time of postmodernism, it does not entirely resolve the problem: while Antiquity’s enlightenment rules the method of interpretation, its humanising identity of *feeling* is also uncannily Romantic, to which Jankélévitch’s steady credo of ineffability and Charm again presents a more complex manifold for reimagining spiritual identity.

**Schopenhauer’s Quintessence**

Almost no-one has grasped the link, very subtle but also very profound in Jankélévitch’s writings, between *charme* as it is engendered by music and love toward another person. Without the one, without the other, we are dead, not dead like the dead, but dead like the living.

—Arnold I. Davidson.

It is tempting to think, particularly in the bond forged between the moral powers of love and music, that Jankélévitch may himself be a ‘hopeless’ Romantic, particularly in his belief that a music lacking the je-ne-sais-quoi of charme, however proficiently composed and brilliantly performed, “lacks a soul. Everything is present, except the heart…the enchanted soul is not a bewitched soul, but an enamoured soul.” It is also tempting to accuse Jankélévitch of taming music through this most humanising of essences. Yet any such equivalence between music and other forms of becoming—such as human sentience—is metaphorical, and while the metaphor is the natural home of the poet—who is “licensed to say everything” and relieved from the task of explaining himself—if the philosopher is to practice such poetry, it is with the proper grammatical caveats in place, without which there can be no earnest engagement with the ineffable’s mystical refusal of the mastery of language:

Everything hangs upon the meaning of the verb to be and the adverb like, and just as sophisms and puns slip without warning from unilateral attribution to ontological identity…so metaphysical-metaphorical analogies about music slip furtively from figural meaning to correct and literal meaning.

Jankélévitch’s “call for silence”, then, is (figuratively speaking) the raising up of a mirror, exposing philosophy’s reluctance to grasp its own poetic immersion and anthropomorphich interchange, its ironic tendency to satisfy the psychological desire to see in the mirror of music its own face. We must also remember that, like Morin’s complex notion of soul ‘in’ film, here too soul is not an essence that stabilizes and centres the human, the world and the cosmos, but an indefinite something bound up in the vital processes of change and becoming, just as the alchemy and metamorphosis of magic is this ineffable process. If music possesses soul, it does so metaphorically, with any unity between human life and the life of music meeting on the thresholds of Charm, ineffability, and the material phenomenon of time; not love itself, but like love, music’s true reality is one of dispossession:

Musical reality is always somewhere else…evoked by means of evasive expressions with double meanings; this spiritual geography…makes all localization fugitive, fleeting: would we not say that music, as a temporal phenomenon, in general refuses spatialization? …the

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157 Jankélévitch, Music and the Ineffable, 12.
158 Ibid., 14.
doubtful homeland of a Charm that is not here, and not there, but everywhere and nowhere... just as the soul challenges all cerebral localization, and God terrestrial localization... pure music itself, exists on no map.\textsuperscript{159}

If Romanticism fairs little better than Antiquity in Jankélévitch’s erudite demolition of philosophy’s soul in music, it is because of this recourse to an impossible topography vouchsafed through this unwitting metaphysical-metaphorical identification. In the age that precedes Gorky’s cinema, the existential bond between music and feeling reaches its zenith, the idea of an ensouled music—in both an objective-ontological \textit{and} subjective-affective sense—coming to dominate Romantic aesthetics: “Music is the art of expressing sensations by modulated sounds. It is the language of emotions.”\textsuperscript{160} “While language expresses our feelings in words, music expresses them by sounds.”\textsuperscript{161} “The composer’s task is to copy nature...to stir the passions at will...to express the living movements of the soul and cravings of the heart.”\textsuperscript{162} “[T]he organ of the \textit{emotions} is \textit{sound}, its intentionally aesthetic language is music.”\textsuperscript{163} With the \textit{feeling} rather than \textit{thinking} soul now firmly at the fore—the swooning heart now racing before the sober mind—music’s Romantic identity is ultimately, for Jankélévitch, another anthropocentric falsity which refuses to be understood as such.

Romanticism’s idea of an \textit{emotional} soul ‘in’ music is most notably attributable to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who rejects the omnipotence of enlightened Reason, thinking instead that “the human Will dominates the soul, that the inner forces of desire and love navigate one’s actions, and that reason, intellect and morality are ultimately undermined by the Will’s power.”\textsuperscript{164} For Schopenhauer, the Will may only ever truly manifest through music, in that only intangible music “penetrates the Will itself.”\textsuperscript{165} Moreover, the composer becomes godlike, for only this particular kind of Creator can reveal the inner nature of the world.\textsuperscript{166} Contra Enlightenment, such ideals are openly embraced, nurtured and developed by

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\textsuperscript{159} Jankélévitch, \textit{Music and the Ineffable}, 103.
\textsuperscript{161} Sulzer (\textit{Theorie der Schönen Künste}), quoted in ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{162} Marpurg (\textit{Krit. Musikus}, Vol. 1., 1750), § 40, quoted in ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{163} Richard Wagner (\textit{Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft}, Selected Works, III., 1850), 99, quoted in ibid., 19.
Richard Wagner, for whom Schopenhauer’s Will was primary. Schonberg recites that in composing *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner’s masterpiece of endless longing and melancholia), Wagner believed himself to be compelled by the power of his will, honouring this force that manifested its existence in his art. ‘I plunged into the inner depths of soul-events and from the innermost centre of the world I fearlessly built up to its outer form…Life and death, the whole meaning and existence of the outer world, here hang on nothing but the inner movements of the soul.’

For Berlioz too, an intimate bond endures between the two:

Love or music—which power can uplift man to the sublimest heights? It is a large question; yet it seems to me that one should answer it in this way: Love cannot give an idea of music; music can give an idea of love. But why should we separate them? They are two wings of the soul.

For Jankélévitch, such intoxicating, sublime communions are inexhaustibly given yet inherently flawed, for neither love nor music are “ideas” comparable with *logos*, leading Jankélévitch to reluctantly depose Schopenhauer’s Will as “the quintessence of essences”.

If music is sentient, it is so metaphorically, however much our romantic thinker-self wagers a conception of truth on the allegorical approximation by confusing subjective affect with objective ontological meaning. Music can only ever indefinitely allude to, vaguely and equivocally suggest or evoke the enigmatic illusion of human feeling; it can never be this definite univocal expression, or directly ‘speak’ this or that particular emotion. Nonetheless, and despite music’s ineffability, infinite “anthropomorphic and anthroposophic generalizations” continue to spiral out through the medium of metaphorical transcription, and it is this endless confusion between what music *is* and what it *does*, between the illusion of a secret inner truth and the affective response, between the ineffable and allegory, that Jankélévitch continues to challenge:

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The “metaphysics of music”…always loses sight of the function of metaphors and the symbolic relativity of symbols. A sonata is like a précis of the human adventure that is bordered by life and death—but is not itself this adventure. …The sonata, the symphony, and the string quartet…are like a thirty-minute recapitulation of the metaphysical and noumenal destiny of the Will but are no means this destiny per se. 171

Once more, this humanising gesture is echoed in cinematic discussions that have yet to relinquish such powerful parentage. Gorbman writes that music is the primary catalyst for signifying “emotion, depth, the obverse of logic”, bringing “a necessary emotional, irrational, romantic, or intuitive dimension…augmenting the external representation…with its inner truth.”172 Against its continuation and proliferation in cognitive theory especially, Gerald Sim argues that such a viewpoint oversimplifies the complexity of the film-music-emotion experience:

[C]ognitivist investigations into film music generally restrict interpretation to narratologically dominant readings, and can thus be aloof to the ways that films’ emotional polyphony can trigger interpretations that transcend both the text and spectatorial subjectivity. Comprehending the link between film music and emotion as a cognitive-psychological process undervalues the many moments when cinema transcends the sum of its parts, overwhelming the capacities of current cognitivist models. ... Scientific method relies on a doctrine of precision and empiricism, requirements that can be incongruent with artistic expression. ...treating music only as a set of emotional signifiers or cues can also carry both methodological and ideological consequences.173

If there is a spiritual consequence at stake also, it not only comes in the negation of the silent spectre’s rich theoretical possibilities, but in this dependence upon a binary logic embedded within classical linear narrative, and its heady authorization of a deep, stable (humanised) centre, moral resolution and righteous consolation. As Jankélévitch shows, music’s ineffability summons a deep confusion between moral and ethical meanings, between judgements and choices: transcribed into cinematic discourse, we could say that the relation between the silent spectre and the argument for presence has less to do with cinematic narrative than an underpinning process of moralization that would seem to haunt the history

171 Jankélévitch, Music and the Ineffable, 14.
172 Gorbman, Unheard Melodies, 79.
of music itself. This continuation for civilising, humanising and moralizing the silent spectre through music, which is itself civilised, humanised and moralized through rational thought, is inherited from the spiritual wells of Platonic and Romantic thought, however much it resists such philosophy, and however much it blithely reconfigures the basic coordinates of life and death to negate the ‘vice’ of silence against the ‘virtues’ of music’s ensouled presence. In so doing, it is, ironically, the mastery of logos, and not music, which ‘cures’ the cinematic spectre of its own dark magic, guiding it back from the edge of an unimaginable abyss, and toward the deep centre of life, enlightenment (and so afterlife) and love. Drawn from this course, the argument for presence is a stunning microcosm of the cultural universe that coddles it, one where, inevitably and inextricably, philosophy and theology converge. In this final dimension of historical influence, I rely upon Cobussen’s rethinking of the relation between music and spirituality, to most clearly emphasise the extent to which a Eurocentric religiosity influences what is purported to be an atheistic argument of realism.

Marcel Cobussen: Music, Spirituality and Catholicism

‘The spiritual’ is not a positively definable quasi-entity beyond or above common reality, referring to something otherworldly or the absolute presence of a divinity; rather it functions, in an ambivalent way, as an alien or monstrous turmoil in the margins of a discourse.

—Marcel Cobussen

When Cobussen presents the human body as the condition of possibility for music’s spirituality, he is challenging the one institution whose love for the Word has the soul entirely in its grasp, and whose regulation of music realizes the Platonic ideal. In Cobussen’s phenomenological sense of spirituality, music operates as a movement between rupture and rapture, as a force that moves us ambivalently and paradoxically “between heaven and earth”, in the liminal non-space that is beyond the governance of a Heaven constructed by the morality of organised religion:

[Music] takes its place between the ethereal and the corporeal. The world in which music exists is a spiritual world. Music is an art of time, flowing in a bodiless world. It surpasses the borders of the universe of bodies. We cannot grasp music in the same way that we can touch and feel matter in our world. Like air, music does not show itself. But even when we thus

\[174\] Cobussen, Thresholds, 66.
assume a close connection between music and spirit, this spiritual dimension needs to be incarnated in order to sound, which means that this incarnation is no accidental supplement, but an inevitable necessity. Not only do we need our ears to hear music, the musician needs his body and/as an instrument to awaken music. Ears, drumming hands, stamping feet, the bow that moves the strings of the cello: these are all part of a bodily world. Music is born in a space that connects a spiritual and an embodied world. …Music’s spirituality is heavenly as well as earthly and simultaneously none of these two, that is, it cannot be reduced to one of the poles.\textsuperscript{175}

Here, Cobussen is responding to the meaning of music as it relates to the metaphysics and morality of Catholicism, both of which intersect on the threshold of the soul, preserving the basic lessons of Platonic thought. Music, as the prime mover and soul of the universe and its celestial bodies, and so the prime mover of human souls with their yielding bodies, continues to suffer this grave charge steeped in moral reckoning. Growing up out of Neoplatonism, Catholicism borrows all of its love and loathing for music from this same reflex, burying its secret “melomania” beneath the “furious energy of melophobia”, as Jankélévitch says.\textsuperscript{176} Again, music’s medicinal purpose is to enlighten the fallen soul which tempers the dangerous body, to return us to the innermost centre of the self where truth (God) dwells, toward the consolations of cosmic interconnectivity, wholeness, and oneness, toward the good, the beautiful, the just and the true, and toward eternity. In The Sacred In Music, Blackwell writes of Christianity as founded on musical suspicion, and steeped in an ambivalence toward its apothecary role in a suffering, imperfect world, its very form “instantiating our fallen condition”, and (quoting Steiner) “communicating the urgency of a great hurt” which manifests in “Christianity’s continued struggle with questions of music’s spiritual value.”\textsuperscript{177}

While music’s purpose is ideally one of worship, salvation and spiritual purification, it is also tied to “pagan practices [of] carnality” and forbidden sensual pleasure, making its fleshy temptations a “distraction from the communal sharing and divine worship it was supposed to serve.”\textsuperscript{178} When in Confessions, Augustine confronts his own fall from grace and contemplates the redemptive, healing power of divine worship through song, he feels himself deeply troubled by music’s affective power, which he fears might become too much of a “temptation, a potential addiction, precisely because of its capacity to penetrate him so deeply.

\textsuperscript{175} Cobussen, \textit{Thresholds}, 45 and 47.
\textsuperscript{176} Jankélévitch, \textit{Music and the Ineffable}, 7.
\textsuperscript{177} Albert L. Blackwell, \textit{The Sacred in Music} (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 127.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 128.
and move him so irresistibly” as to become lost to his weaknesses.\textsuperscript{179} The “furious energy of melophobia” makes haste, convincing Augustine that his own weeping in the presence of music’s beauty comes not from the sensual persuasions of lush, melodic intoxication, but from the piety of the text sung: beneath the word of worship the melody must obey, else bodies and minds may descend into the carnal wreckage that has hedonism in its grip. It is a distinction that, for Blackwell, prophecies the trajectory of “western Christian attitudes ever after”:

\begin{quote}
It is the opinion that music’s primary role in Christian worship is to serve the meaning of sacred texts, with a secondary role—more a concession to human weakness than a mandate—of “indulging the ears” of “weaker spirits,” that they might “be inspired with feelings of devotion”\textsuperscript{180}.
\end{quote}

The regulation of such a hierarchy enables Augustine to restore Plato’s earlier belief that music’s immateriality is a “warrant of its ability to reach the transcendental realm”, that music is “a privileged medium when it comes to expressing philosophical or religious ideas” and can

\begin{quote}
foster man’s detachment from the material world and his ascent to God. This is possible, Augustine continues, due to the numerical nature of music, which it shares with the material world–created and ordered according to number, as well as with God: the immaterial source of all number and order.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

As Jankélévitch writes, for Augustine, “any singing perceptible to the ears and the body is the exoteric envelope of a smooth, ineffable, and celestial melody”,\textsuperscript{182} that is, the harmony of the spheres, which, interchangeably ‘means’ the music of the spheres, which interchangeably ‘means’ perfection, order, virtue, eternity.

That the harmony and order of God’s spiritual polis might be regulated by music, that spirituality itself cannot exist beyond the “menacing yet reassuring doctrine of the Church”,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{179} Blackwell, \textit{The Sacred in Music}, 128.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 129.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Christaens, “Sounding Silence, Moving Stillness,” 53.
\item \textsuperscript{182} Jankélévitch, \textit{Music and the Ineffable}, 10.
\end{itemize}
are primary problems for Cobussen. Taking up the legacy of the Nietzschean death of God, Cobussen turns to those spiritual theorists who have become disenchanted with both religion and the ‘soullessness’ of nihilistic capitalism, yet who nonetheless desire spiritual meaningfulness amongst the absurdity and futility of the human condition, who seek sincerity, accountability and an ethical sensibility amidst cynicism, narcissism, and materialistic decadence. For Heidegger, Catholicism’s humanised identity of God—the “metaphysical construction” of “long-established truth dogmas”——is a betrayal of the unknown truth of God due to the reliance upon faith, a faith Heidegger discards for the “metaphysical homelessness” of this unknown entity. Gianni Vattimo similarly “rejects the image of a God which contains all characteristics of omnipotence, absoluteness, eternity, and transcendence, calling them “projections of human desires,” which reinforce a dependence “upon a Supreme Being.” In bringing music to bear upon this rift between established religious constructions and their emancipation, Cobussen returns to the problem of harmony that marks the Platonic-Catholic operation:

According to Jacques Attali, music is—or at least was—a strategy running parallel to religion. Primordially, music as well as religion has as its function the creation, legitimation, and maintenance of order. Its primary purpose is not to be sought in aesthetics, which is a modern invention, but in the effectiveness of its participation in social regulation. Both music and religion produce harmony and are produced to make people believe, to believe in order…

Arguably, film music theory’s own reservation toward the liminal silent spectre, as a thing that requires resolution through regulation, is sired from this dogmatic line. As the specified site of inner truth, non-religious instrumental music continues to fulfil this sacred function, making order from disorder, harmonising the dissonance of the undead, recapitulating the religious rule. When an explicitly theological theory arrives in Kutter Callaway’s 2013 Scoring Transcendence: Contemporary Film Music as Religious Experience, its call to restore divine presence through music is bricolaged from the very flaws, omissions, and generalisations that have ever obstructed a properly liminal appreciation of cinematic-musical complexity:

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184 Cobussen, Thresholds, 24 n20.
185 Ibid., 24.
The music we hear in film does not simply invite a theological response; it demands one. … I want to explore…what it means for God to converse with human beings in and through the images we hear. … In contradistinction to live-action films, the world that exists within an animated film is wholly constructed, every sound, every shadow, and every movement is the direct product of the filmmakers’ intentional, shaping influence. Consequently, music is frequently called upon to invest this wholly constructed world with a modicum of “life.” Music functions in these films to “animate” the animation; it inspirits and breathes life (or anima) into images that are patently artificial and entirely virtual. …the very presence of music in film signifies emotions.187

With Callaway’s sweeping endorsement of those hierarchies that obscure the meaningfulness of the animistic silent spectre, the sacred traces that haunt the argument for presence become apparent, however much film musicology itself avoids such open religiosity. Compelling us beyond the ‘dangerous’ immorality of the disturbingly undead and returning us to the innermost depths of the soul, music ushers in the ineffable presence of the divine, becoming the singular means with which to engage with existential “near-universals”:

Loneliness, isolation, and the loss of loved ones are near-universal categories that are deeply embedded in the human experience. Yet…the music is uniquely able to address these realities by opening the audience out into something larger than themselves, something that lies beyond the representational capacities of moving images. It signifies an ineffable presence that pervades the immanent frame of the cinematic world—a delicate yet distinctive beauty that somehow exists in the midst of the pain and the chaos.188

Against anti-theistic credos of nihilism, the absurdity of life’s labours, and the anguish of death, Callaway’s ineffable music (as God’s messenger) ultimately resides more in the realm of eternity than time, where “through our discovery of wisdom, we actually enter into the presence of the transcendent Spirit of God who is immanent in the world”.189 As such, music remains the sublime messenger of hope, annihilating anxiety, incertitude and liminality, and overcoming the solitude and finitude of death.

188 Callaway, *Scoring Transcendence*, 57.
189 Ibid., 56–57.
Conclusion: Cinema, Music and Death

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?

— Friedrich Nietzsche

As problems of death themselves, are the forms of cinema and music haunted by the loss of the soul, the sacred, and the divine, that is, the loss of a particular consolation that comes with such transcendental certainty? If claiming the presence of eternity in an age well past Nietzsche’s “proclamation” comes with this ironic caveat, is it possible to rethink the spirituality of music and cinema beyond such severe divisions, away from the “certainty” that Callaway’s theology privileges, and towards Cobussen’s more complex spirituality that nomadically wanders, gropes and errs? Such wandering necessarily requires a rather different stance to the solemnity associated with orthodox faith, and thus, calls upon a rather different perspective toward the boundaries of existence itself. When Deleuze and Guattari speak of the joy that binds music and death, they are clearly invoking the Dionysian forces of Nietzsche rather than Socratic wisdom or Christian piety:

Music is never tragic, music is joy. But there are times it necessarily gives us a taste for death; not so much happiness as dying happily, being extinguished. Not as a function of a death instinct it allegedly awakens in us, but of a dimension proper to its sound assemblage, to its sound machine, the moment that must be confronted, the moment the transversal turns into a line of abolition. Peace and exasperation. Music has a thirst for... destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation.

As “the antithesis of the traditional, Platonic approach” to music, Deleuze and Guattari are not here suggesting the eternal soul’s final release from a body that sullies the pious pursuit of knowledge and rational thought, nor are they appealing to the psychoanalytical death-

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191 Barber, *Deleuze and the Naming of God*, 1–4.
192 Cobussen, *Thresholds*, 139.
193 For the broader significance of joy to Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of desire, see Jay Johnston, *Angels of Desire: Esoteric Bodies, Aesthetics and Ethics*, Gnostica: Texts and Interpretations (London; Oakville: Equinox, 2008), 137.
drive: their “moment that must be confronted” is the moment that the argument for presence carefully denies.

Is it possible to suggest that the life of music might equally be a reckoning with death—perhaps as the euphonic spectre that ironically haunts death—if death itself is a thing that can be haunted as it endlessly haunts the living? Morin’s rapturous myth of immortality for cinema has its musical counterpart, though, as Jankélévitch and Cobussen have shown, music is so persuasive in its spiritual illusions that we stifle the rupture death gives to thought: with music pressed within the cinematic human figure, with life so secured, the many marks of our own finitude go quietly away: the void, the abyss, the gnawing absurdity of life, the negative residue that clings to silence and darkness, the anxiety of oblivion, the desire to excommunicate the primal fear of an eternal solitude. Those aspects of consciousness that the silent spectre evokes—death, loss, forgetting, loneliness—are those things that are carefully evaded for their proximity to the unthinkable possibility of belonging nowhere, neither ‘down here’ nor ‘up there’. David Lynch’s elephant man dies to Samuel Barber’s Adagio for Strings, and surely there is no purer ascent to heaven than upon the wings of this music. Yet his death is an act of suicide, a resignation and escape from the grotesque creaturely body that incarcerates the beautiful human mind. In this macabre moment, does God make an exception? If film music possesses a positive annihilating function, it is to eradicate these primordial uncertainties through the revival of the soul, whose place beyond death must not be Gorky’s no-man’s-land. This either/or predicament is precisely the mode of thought that a complex liminal perspective reimagines.

Through Bazin, Morin and Cholodenko, the silent spectre remains a figure of spiritual complexity, of uncanny, liminal forces, of ambiguity, incertitude and paradox. Comparatively, we might also suggest that this complexity thrives in a similar threshold that Jankélévitch and Cobussen theorise for musical meaning, a similar liminal space which negotiates the boundary between ineffable musical mystery and an intuited human essence, where presence and absence again converge to complicate, rather than resolve, music’s aura of spiritual significance. Limited by its own binary logic, the argument for presence in film musicology refuses the extraordinary theoretical possibilities of this shared liminal zone.

Unable to speak of the incertitude of death itself or the moment of dying, unaware of its reflexive restoration of transcendental thought, the argument for presence performs as the affirmation of the living, yet unwittingly sides with the essence of eternity, refusing to speak of time itself as the primordial ground for our experience of life, music, and cinema. Ironically, the argument for presence is haunted by the vision of the spiritual obstacle that cinema itself poses for our paradoxically post-secular, post-religious time, a vision of liminal belief. As such, I see a remarkable opportunity to contemplate the significance of those liminal modes, such as the ineffable and the uncanny, that not only permeate the aura of mystery intrinsic to both the cinematic human figure and musical meaning, but also, as we shall continue to discover, participate diversely within discrete theories of pre-Christian, Platonic, Christian and atheistic belief.

In leaving the discipline of film musicology now, I appreciate its argument as the catalyst for revealing the spiritual complexity it denies, through the very controversy it simultaneously exudes and evades. Toward a theory of spiritual complexity, I wonder if it is possible to restage the argument for presence to understand, rather than unknowingly repeat or reactively depose, this recalcitrant, apparently universal faith in music’s sentience, and could we do so through the paradoxical components of the uncanny itself? How complex might music’s secret, anthropomorphic meanings become if I attempt to theorise—from a transparently self-reflective, ironic, theatrical perspective—the uncanny presence of a Nietzschean and Platonic belief that haunts the “inner monologue” of my own narcissistic musical encounter?
[T]he secret of all music perhaps, is to make you believe that it possesses some sayable secret.

—Marcel Cobussen¹

Have you ever seen your friend asleep—and found out how he looks? What is the face of your friend anyway? It is your own face in a rough and imperfect mirror.

—Friedrich Nietzsche²

All music is melancholy, but modern music knows its own melancholy.

—Michael P. Steinberg³

All thought is anthropomorphic… . If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled.

—Albert Camus⁴

This is the strangeness of the uncanny, a flickering moment of embroilment in the experience of something at once strange and familiar.

—Nicholas Royle⁵

An inner (subconscious) monologue for the musical encounter… Or, notes from the journal of a narcissistic musicophiliac.⁶

Music…my strange and melancholy friend…the friend I know secretly knows (me)…my confidante, my consort who desires (my love), who feels (my feelings), who speaks of sadness without speaking at all…who haunts my thinking, speaking, desiring and

¹ Cobussen, Thresholds, 4.
⁵ Nicholas Royle, The Uncanny (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), vii.
feeling…who longs as I long, and envies as I envy, who steals my thoughts to make me a stranger to myself…I give music a mask and a mirror with which to fulfil my own desire…I make its strangeness familiar…yet in the end, I am master of nothing…yet then again, and secretly, I know I am somewhere in this music…I feel it…I am losing myself in the mirror…I am lost in a “wilderness of doubles”…I am making a friend for the spectre in film…

Nietzsche’s Hermit: The Friend with Two Faces

“There is always one too many around me”—thus thinks the hermit. “Always one times one—eventually that makes two.”

I and me are always too deep in conversation: how could one stand that if there were no friend? For the hermit the friend is always the third person: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths. Alas, there are too many depths for all hermits, therefore they long so for a friend and his height.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche’s hermit is a beginning for thinking the musical uncanny. Or rather, Nietzsche’s hermit is a way into this inner monologue, a way to think the uncanny nature of thought in the midst of the musical encounter, in the threshold where the true being of feeling and its musical semblance strangely become ‘one.’ The uncanny is nothing if not a problem of self-identity, of self-division and doubling, self-loathing and love, lunacy and illumination…within which incertitude would surely undermine knowing if not for the third person, without which the secret dialogues of I and me would vanish into “too many depths.” Hermitic thought is uncanny.

In Nicholas Royle’s study *The Uncanny*, the spectre of film is deservedly present. Yet music—specifically instrumental music—with its anthropomorphic hauntings, its doublings of thought and feeling, and its illusions of a nameable, knowable meaning, remains

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9 This Nietzschean approach to the uncanny process of thought in the musical encounter appreciates and acknowledges the precedence of earlier genre-related texts that approach film music as uncanny. See, for example, K.J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005); Isabella van Elffen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).
10 Royle, “Film,” in *The Uncanny*, 75–83.
profundely absent. Nonetheless, Royle’s conceptual framework captures precisely the spiritual ground with which I seek to theorise a musical uncanny:

Uncanniness entails a sense of uncertainty and suspense, however momentary and unstable. As such it is often to be associated with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers. …[in his] essay of 1919 ‘Das Unheimliche’ (‘The Uncanny’)…Freud was perhaps the first to foreground the distinctive nature of the uncanny as a feeling of something not simply weird or mysterious but, more specifically, as something strangely familiar…. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced…The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper… . It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was ‘part of nature’: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world. …The uncanny can be a matter of something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the return of the dead. But it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy...It can involve a feeling of something beautiful but at the same time frightening, as in the figure of the double or telepathy. It comes above all, perhaps, in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness. The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter...something that should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. But it is not ‘out there’, in any simple sense: as a crisis of the proper and natural, it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality. …Above all, the uncanny is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue.11

What Royle provides here is the provocative grounding for a musical uncanny, within which thought itself splits and doubles in its desire to “know thyself”12 through music. For such is the strangeness of the (secret) musical encounter, when music feels incomparably familiar in its doubling of sentience. And then, such is the strangeness of the friend (the familiar) of Nietzsche’s hermit, who, lost amongst the clamour of his solitude, is strange to himself. Where is he in all these hims? Him who? The hermit or the friend? Are they not one and the same? He is—they are—profundely suited for problematizing the labyrinthine identity crisis.

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that comes in this ominous crossing of boundaries between music and (my) feeling. To listen to music is always to lose a little of oneself in the music. Or did I mean to say “to lose oneself in the music”? In problematizing the difference between human sentience—thoughts, memories, desires, feelings—and the semblance of such sentience in music, is it less a crossing than a vanishing then? Why make such a desirable vanishing morally questionable? Where is the error in losing myself? Yet something in me feels reconciled to this self-forgetting, for in crossing and vanishing, I feel myself to be deep in the river of truth. My truth. I am home. In music’s “peculiar air of “otherness,” [its] “strangeness,” “semblance,” [and] “illusion”,[13] what is more familiar to me than the self, myself, my secrets and my feelings? Annalise Baird writes that the uncanny’s intrinsic “(un)familiarity” is connected to the self, since it is the self with which we are most familiar. The most important boundary of all is the one separating ourselves from the outside world—the self from the non-self—because it is this boundary which establishes at the deepest level what should and should not be familiar. We experience uncanniness or horror when what is outside of this boundary is familiar and what is inside this boundary is foreign, thus rendering the boundary obsolete.[14]

Yet when music speaks to me of myself, I sense no horror in the dissolution of the boundary between my inner world and the world of music. I am hardly Cobussen’s nomad, wandering, erring, and groping through a spiritual no-man’s-land.[15] In my love for this feeling of lostness that music’s transport provides, I know precisely where I am. The spiritual meaning of music’s mystery comes in the luminous, radiant rapture of feeling utterly at one with truth, not in the dark, foreign outposts of “an alien or monstrous turmoil in the margins of a discourse.”[16] It is within this unquestionable feeling of belonging within the secret, of belonging within this intimate clasp of reciprocity, that compels my leap to the logical (anthropocentric) epiphany, authorising my claim upon wisdom and promoting my self-assured discourse. The meaning of music is (human) feeling. Sentience is within the music itself. In the stellar leap to feeling I become Romantic, for the leap to this peculiar truth—to knowing, writing and speaking music’s sentient meaning—is the leap of the faithful lover, not the unloved exile.

[16] Ibid., 66 (italics added).
Yet the leap is not the safe crossing it pretends to be. However superbly critiqued by thinkers such as Nietzsche, Jankélévitch and Cobussen, the leap to truth cannot easily be overcome without undertaking and surviving a “spiritual ordeal” of sorts. What river has Cobussen crossed to be able to say so simply, the “secret of all music, perhaps, is to make you believe that it possesses some sayable secret”? Toward our relation with the world, Camus writes:

The mind’s deepest desire…parallels man’s unconscious feelings in the face of the universe: it is an insistence upon familiarity, an appetite for clarity. Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal. …The truism ‘All thought is anthropomorphic’ has no other meaning. …If thought discovered in the shimmering mirrors of phenomena eternal relations capable of summing themselves up…in a single principle, then would be seen an intellectual joy of which the myth of the blessed would be but a ridiculous imitation. That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse for the human drama.

Is this true of the leap to musical meaning? Am I sick with longing for the consolation of such unoriginal “eternal relations”? Do I disfigure the mystery of music by giving it my own face? To see in life this particular semblance, unlimited and omnipresent, rather than the true being of things, is not to “see” but to desire; to desire a knowledge of the world that returns me to myself. In my desire to know music, I do more than reduce it to this vague category of ‘the human’; I enlist music to the regime of egocentric thought. In the mirror of music, I see myself. As uncanny, the musical encounter is steeped in ironic duplicities. My enduring love for music (the love I think it has for me) grazes against the saccharine narcissism of this self-portrait. And yet something in music mocks my desire, mocks the boundary between music’s ontological and affective forces, mocks the space between what music is, and what music does. This profound sense of familiarity is leading me astray…

What is required to preserve the mystery? Must all familiarity be relinquished? In the ordeal of love’s longing, is it the absolute alienation of the self that is required? To preserve the mystery that marks the restless presence of the uncanny, is it safer to privilege the radical otherness of the strange, to rush more assuredly toward a speaking of music as an

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17 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 2–3.
18 Cobussen, Thresholds, 4.
unimaginable existential *darkness*? For surely it is music’s overwhelming sense of strangeness that compels its mystery, with mystery itself being the lure which compels the desire to know music’s meaning as sentient. Yet for Freud and Royle, the uncanny entails the peculiarities of the strange *without abandoning* the familiar. That Royle emphasises the *necessity* of the familiar may well be the key to understanding the liminal complexity of music’s own secret encounter, an encounter which remains—recurringly, and in defiance to its ineffable truth—*more familiar than strange*:

If psychoanalysis and deconstruction have one thing to teach, it would be about how and why we must not simply give ourselves up or over to the uncanny. There has to be an abiding attachment to the familiar, even if it is one that requires ceaseless suspicion. There has to be a grounding in the rational in order to experience its trembling and break-up. There has to be a sense of home and homeliness within and beyond which to think the unhomely.20

Is *anthropomorphism* the “home” that haunts the human relation to music? In my love for a music who speaks to me of myself, and whose love is my love, there is no vanishing, only endless homecomings to satisfy this most uncanny nostalgia. In music’s strange semblance of the inner life of feeling, in the ‘irrational,’ intuitive belief in music’s sentient truth, in leaping to love’s object, this unchecked, undesired self-idolatry paradoxically forms the ground for my ‘rational’ thought. My love is a tender trap. I believe in a meaning of life which remains anthropomorphically, *egocentrically*, in pursuit of this secret mystery of *me*…I am Narcissus.

Such narcissism, then, throws down a curious gauntlet. This sense of familiarity in music which brings me home to myself is the strangeness of music. The force of music’s *semblance* which opposes the *true being* of feeling, and the inextricable conspiracy of the two within the musical encounter, is preceded by a tendency far more difficult to purge from my own habitus of thought. For Nietzsche most particularly, this problem of anthropomorphism is the bogey of *all* human thought.21 Royle writes, “everywhere in Nietzsche’s texts can we find a more or less explicit engagement with uncanniness.”22 Nietzsche, who loves music for its semblance of melancholy suffering and ecstatic *willing*, for its bond with the earthed body of life and time…And then, through his inversion and overturning of true being and semblance,

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everywhere in Nietzsche’s thought is *Platonism*. Plato, who loves music for its semblance of the Idea, for its bond with the transcendent *psyché* of death and eternity... Moreover, everywhere in Plato is the *anthropomorphism* that Nietzsche petitions us to overcome, however much he *himself* is plagued by its inevitability. Though Nietzsche accepts this ironic inevitability through a “consciously adopted anthropomorphism,” Plato is already haunting the (Nietzschean) musical uncanny.

In this crossing which is also a vanishing (a vanishing into the feeling of music), I see (reluctantly) the epic extent of my own belief in the secret music keeps: in loving my love for the hidden message, I am rousing the sleeping giant of my own inner Plato, the imaginary double who is the friend for Nietzsche’s hermit, a friend who has not one but *two* faces.

**Music, a Friend for Thought, Speaks a Sorrow**

Music seems to be better at being than at knowing....melancholy is the condition of music—*all* music... Music is melancholic in relation to its own desire. To riff, then, on another Freudian question: what does music want? Music wants to speak and to speak importantly, and that unfulfillable wish is the source of its melancholia. Musical melancholia is an epistemic predicament, an attribute of the musical desire to know. ...If melancholy is the condition of music, then music of any period, place, genre, and style can be considered through this lens.

—Michael P. Steinberg

In an early draught of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1870–71), Nietzsche writes, “My philosophy an *inverted Platonism*: the further removed from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in *Schein* as goal.” Even before we enter Nietzsche’s world of Apollonian *shining* dream images and ecstatic Dionysiac self-forgetting, the musical uncanny looms large through this concept of *Schein*, the term used to “name that semblance or appearance that Platonism distinguishes from true being.” Undergirded by the *anthropomorphic* impulse, the nature of music’s semblance is nothing if not uncanny, its

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24 Stack, “Nietzsche and Anthropomorphism,” 41, 44.
25 Ibid., 41.
26 Steinberg, “Music and Melancholy,” 289–90.
28 Ibid.
magnetism to the difference of the strange (and the strangeness of difference) not only overwhelming the sameness of the familiar (and the familiarity of sameness) but also—and paradoxically—siphoning its exiled otherness from familiarity’s great cosmic undercurrents of unity.

These, I think, are the uncanny forces that haunt Steinberg’s comparatively bold Freudian declaration for an unapologetically humanised music—a music who longs “to speak importantly” and whose unfulfilled desire creates for itself a body of sorrow ever weeping, feeling and being, with “being” itself taking on uncanny Platonic shadings in the eternalising, universalising doctrine that all music is melancholy. While Steinberg defines music as the province of subjectivity, where, in such a thesis, is a self-conscious acknowledgement regarding the premise of anthropomorphism? How does Steinberg remain safely beyond music’s affective force to claim such a truth? And then, how might the imbricated claim for music’s inability to speak (thus to know) lie with his own melancholy inscription without the caveat of uncanniness? In drawing only on the anthropomorphic unity of music’s true being, in conforming to love’s belonging, what becomes of semblance, the aura of mystery, strangeness and otherness that also seeks to wear this mask of truth? Finally, why does a rational discourse on music’s humanisation feel intuitively strange and ethically unsettling—and thus counter-intuitive to the preservation of music’s mystery—while the sensed presence of sentience within the affective musical encounter becomes an unquestionable affirmation of familiarity? Simply put, why does Steinberg’s idea make sense in the moment of my own immediate, subjective, listening and playing experience, yet seem absurd when music itself is not present, thus becoming an idea temporally removed from feeling? This is, for me, a rather striking example of the musical uncanny in action, one whose provocations allow me to return, via Deleuze, to Nietzsche’s hermit and the friend of wisdom, to problematise the relation between music and my inner self through the liminality of the “strangely familiar,” the grounding aporia which marks the uncanny. It is to set in motion a ceaseless rivalry between thought and feeling, where music’s duplicitous and narcissistic anthropomorphism endlessly, ironically, returns me to myself. It is this moment of becoming double within myself, of becoming the friend with two faces, that I suggest constitutes the uncanny musical encounter. It is to wonder—as a desiring, thinking self with other inner selves—who thinks and who desires: I, myself, me, my “friend” who wears two faces, or music itself? How does the friend wear two faces anyway, if Nietzsche speaks only of one? Doesn’t he?
However absent music *appears* to be in the hermit’s parable on the nature of thought, I suggest that it superbly narrates the uncanny doubling of myself within myself, endlessly looping the uncanny semblance of feeling that dwells in the space between (my) thought and music’s being. To make this conceptually difficult crossing, I would rely on Deleuze’s reading of the identity of the Greek philosopher in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, for it is in this reading that semblance begins to show its utterly uncanny nature.

**Deleuze’s Reading of the Mask(s)**

Let us first revisit the hermit’s friend as Nietzsche presents him through *Zarathustra*:

“There is always one too many around me”—thus thinks the hermit. “Always one times one—eventually that makes two.”

I and me are always too deep in conversation: how could one stand that if there were no friend? For the hermit the friend is always the third person: the third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths. Alas, there are too many depths for all hermits, therefore they long so for a friend and his height.29

To this, Deleuze writes:

*Philosophos* does not mean “wise man” but “friend of wisdom”. But “friend” must be interpreted in a strange way: the friend, says Zarathustra, is always a third person in between “I” and “me” who pushes me to overcome myself and to be overcome in order to live. …The friend of wisdom is the one who appeals to wisdom, but in the way that one appeals to a mask without which one would not survive, the one who makes use of wisdom for new, bizarre, and dangerous ends…. He wants wisdom to overcome itself and to be overcome.30

Already, the uncanny’s (identity) crisis of the natural is making itself felt through this strangely plural sense of a philosopher whose veils and masks give the hermit the height that overcomes the abyss of unknowing.31 As “the friend or lover of wisdom,” the philosopher “searches for wisdom but does not possess it.”32 The philosopher is not wise himself, but

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longing to master wisdom, makes for himself the mask of imposture to pretend a claim upon wisdom, thus cannily claiming the “thinker” identity: in so doing, the philosopher becomes the semblance of wisdom. He is the actor, the method actor, who lives what he seeks to perform to perfection in the theatre of life. Here again, semblance must be understood across a complex plurality of senses that give it its uncanny nature: burrowing beneath the unsettlingments of otherness and strangeness, it also shelters the familiarity of the friend. As the strangely familiar, semblance infinitely regresses into the warp and weft of inner and outer doubling. As Daniel W. Smith writes, the object of wisdom not only takes on the guise of the human, but becomes this guise within the self:

For Deleuze, this new definition of the thinker is of decisive importance: with the Greeks, the friend becomes a presence internal to thought. The friend is no longer related simply to another person, but also to an Entity or Essence, an Idea which constitutes the object of its desire (Eros). “I am the friend of Plato,” says the philosopher, “but more so, I am the friend of Wisdom, of the True, of the Concept.”

In this reciprocity of friendship, in becoming human, the Essence (the Idea) becomes the eidetic double—the eidolon (the image)—of the “deepest” part of the self, myself. For Nietzsche, such semblance within the self is forever the trickster loitering in the margins of thought, with the mask only lowered in moments of self-absence, as in the cloistered nocturne of dreams, where uncanny strangeness prowls and withdraws: “Have you ever seen your friend asleep,” asks Nietzsche’s Zarathustra,

and found out how he looks? What is the face of your friend anyway? It is your own face in a rough and imperfect mirror. …Were you not shocked that your friend looked like that? O my friend, man is something to be overcome. …Your dream should betray to you what your friend does while your awake.

In this way, such friendship is inevitably narcissistic: as the ‘I’ and the ‘eye,’ wisdom not only becomes human, but becomes the one human I desire to know (to see) more than all others, yet who endlessly eludes my knowing. Cunning and wily, the friend is a trickster,

33 Smith, “The Concept of the Simulacrum,” 93.
unveiling us to ourselves if only we would have the courage to look more closely into the
mirror and the dream. Always searching for the consolation of unity, always restless for the
belonging of the familiar, always creating crowds for company so as not to be alone, our
“faith in others betrays in what respect we would like to have faith in ourselves. Our longing
for a friend is our betrayer.”

Later, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari will ask, as if for the first time, “Who is
this friend of humankind? Is it the philo-sopher as he appears in classical thought, even if he
is an aborted unity that makes itself felt only through its absence or subjectivity, saying all
the while, I know nothing, I am nothing?” The hermit’s friend—the strange guest whose
uncanny presence enables survival and whose creation *rescues* the hermit from the abyss of
unknowing and un-belonging—is the *maker* of the thinker: in wearing the mask of wisdom,
the hermit may perform the *theatre* of truth, a theatre which is decidedly sacred. Deleuze
writes that in wearing the “contemplative air of the priest, of the ascetic and religious man
who dominated the world before he appeared,” this *new* kind of thinker, knowing nothing and
being nothing, survives through both his faith in the mythical power of the mask and his
resilient refusal to remove the mask:

The mask or the trick are laws of nature and therefore something more than mere mask or
trick. …philosophy itself does not throw off its ascetic mask as it grows up: in a way it must
believe in this mask, it can only conquer its mask by giving it a new sense which finally
expresses its true, anti-religious force. We see that the art of interpreting must also be an art of
piercing masks, of discovering the one that masks himself, why he does it and the point of
keeping up the mask while it is being reshaped.

In the compulsion to make the mask, and then in its overcoming, conquering and piercing,
Deleuze’s metamorphosis appears to articulate *two* masks, *both* of which I believe are equally
present in the uncanny musical encounter, *both* of which preserve the imposture of reverent
knowing which underscores the desire to interpret and thus to know: the one I sense to be my
own inner Plato, which requires piercing for me to “grow up”, and then the other that
Nietzsche believes will do the piercing. The first, we might tentatively name the mask of true

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38 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 5.
being who is a “despiser of the body,” who loves the good, just and true Idea that shines through the Apollonian dream image; the second, the mask of “semblance” which loves the tragic and ecstatic Dionysian body of feeling and willing. Through the philosophical pursuit for wisdom’s friendship, both masks are lovers of music, death and eternity, and both are bound to the humanising gesture that overcomes the incertitude of both music and death’s mystery. This is what I understand to be the friend with two faces, the uncanny double within who affirms and consoles not only my desire to know (and so to speak and to write) music’s secret as melancholy feeling, but also my desire to feel music’s melancholy suffering, willing and desiring. Moreover, the double within is the force whose willing for immortality overcomes the fear of finitude: in the true being and semblance of music’s sentience, I am compelled beyond the bounds of finitude.

In this clumsy gesture to grasp the magnitude of music’s affective presence, is it possible to suggest that in my love and desire to know music’s mystery, and in losing myself in the mirror of feeling, I wear both masks, and wear them at one and the same time? For in presenting two masks, and so two kinds of semblance, Deleuze is speaking of two kinds of truth-seeking, both of which, in the case of music, appear to haunt the leap from musical experience to anthropocentric meaning.

Towards this self-reflective, ironic framing of a musical uncanny then, the path I necessarily seek is one of understanding, rather than overcoming or piercing my human condition to love and desire music’s hidden messages, and my tendency to believe, instinctively and impossibly, in the being of music’s melancholy desire. Is my enduring feeling that music knows some kind of sentient truth conspiring with this inner mask of Plato? But then, is it not also, at one and the same time, also consorting with this second mask, the one that transforms Plato’s with a more “tragic” veil? However epically outmoded, such Romantic belief in music’s sentience remains beholden to the consolations of unity, familiarity and “truth” that the anthropomorphic mask provides, a mask that wears the two faces of thought and feeling. If, for Cobussen, the “secret of all music…is to make you believe that it possesses some sayable secret”, what greater secret is there than the secret of the self? I do not think the secret vanishes at all in the solitude and silence of thoughts that come after the moment of music, in an atmosphere removed from the immediacy of affective feeling. Thought is the home of

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speaking and writing those mysteries that the friend of wisdom befriends. In listening to
music, I cannot release my abiding attachment to the familiar, however suspect. And so I
cannot abandon the feeling that music is my strangely beautiful and melancholy friend who
speaks her sorrow “importantly”, however much Cobussen cautions against such belief:

To pretend to conceal is to seduce discourse, to give rise to it and simultaneously lead it
astray. This is, however, precisely a way of positing otherness, the otherness of music, of
outwitting interpretative colonizations, and of keeping, preserved from meaning, the pleasure
of listening ...writing can never be an entrance of meaning to music, an entry by way of the
nameable; that door is blocked. The meaning of music lies in a keeping-at-a-distance of
writing, reading, interpreting ...

What ordeal does Cobussen endure to transcend the belief in music’s human-ness? Is music
no longer his friend? What spiritual ordeal emancipates him from the lure of the mirror? I see
that I am not yet free. In my abiding attachment to the two familiar faces of knowing and
feeling, my ordeal is less a triumphant conquering of the “false” mask of true being, and more
the reluctant reckoning with an unyielding, restless duplicity. And so, rather than follow
Deleuze further into his own overturning of Platonism, or pretend to affect the acuity that
Cobussen possesses, I would stay with this reading of the hermit’s friend, and attempt to
draw out what I suspect are the duplicitous, unruly and entirely uncanny processes of thought
that awaken to war uneasily in the presence of music’s secret. In returning once more to
Platonism then (as Deleuze himself urges), let us reroute Deleuze and Guattari’s question,
“Who is the friend of humankind?” to ask, somewhat rhetoricly, “Who is the friend of
wisdom, if not music?”

Plato: The Friend of Wisdom and the Mask of Apollo

The Dream of Apollonian Shining

In the Phaedrus (229e), Socrates speaks of the desire to know himself against his incapacity
to possess such wisdom: “But for these things I have no leisure at all. The cause of it, my
friend, is the following. I am not yet capable, in line with the Delphic inscription, to know

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40 Cobussen, Thresholds, 4.
myself”. In reverence to the oracle of the Delphinian—Apollo—and through another esoteric message, Socrates believes the pursuit of wisdom to be peculiarly musical. As Pelosi writes, in the *Phaedo* (60d—61b), Socrates confesses that “throughout his life he had interpreted the oneiric warning: ‘practice and compose music’…as an invitation to practise the ‘greatest music’…that is philosophy.” Socrates’ faith in the omen (to guide the philosopher toward the true nature of his work) is something of a threshold upon which two luminous forces converge: the radiant, visionary nature of the dream, and the glorious authority of the sun god Apollo, who presides over the famous oracle at Delphi. Leader of the Muses, god of music, art and poetry, the artistic force of Apollo irrupts from nature itself, that is, the Sun; Apollo’s “eye must be sunlike, as befits his origin”. As the soothsayer god, Apollo is, for Nietzsche, “the ‘shining one,’ the deity of light” who “holds sway over the beautiful illusion of the inner fantasy world”, reigning over the world of dreams. As the divine province within which images shine, the dream world’s glorious Schein is the clairvoyant realm of revelatory truth. “Here,” writes John Sallis, “the word Schein will need to be read in its full range of senses: shine, look, appearance, semblance, illusion.” For Schein to be, “it must show itself, must shine forth; only insofar as it shines so as to have a look can it then become…an appearance of something else that perhaps does not shine forth”. As the god of divination, healing and purification, and embodying the light of order, harmony, reason and moderation, Apollo is the friend of man’s endless desire for self-knowledge, the friend of luminous revelation. In this sense, Socrates’ dream is the nocturnal, though equally luminous, double of the Delphic inscription, this other musical divination coming not in any journey by foot or in day-lit gazing with eyes wide open, but in the inner pilgrimage of his sleeping self, in the visitation of a shining image which guides Socrates back to the true nature of his quest for self-knowledge.

Thus in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche calls upon Apollo to align the abiding attachment both philosopher and artist share in their longing to live within the “beautiful illusion of the

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43 Pelosi, Plato on Music, Soul and Body, 1.
45 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 16.
47 Ibid., 25.
48 Ibid.
dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is a consummate artist,” and where “all shapes speak to us”. This union of philosopher and artist is definitive for the gradual realisation of Nietzsche’s Platonic inversion. As Sallis writes so eloquently, in summoning Apollo, “Nietzsche would rescue Plato the artist from the Platonic fable of the true world, that is, from the history of metaphysics.” If Plato wears the mask of the shining god’s beauty, truth and artistry, it is most immediately evident through the poetic quality of his own dialogues. For Nietzsche, the Platonic dialogue is the province within which “Plato the thinker” borrows the voice of “Plato the poet” to speak his truth. Through a “mixture of all available styles and forms, hovering somewhere between narrative, lyric poetry and drama, between prose and poetry,” Plato drives poetry “into new and unknown channels”: for Nietzsche, this is “the lifeboat” which saves the “shipwrecked, older poetry and all its children,” becoming an “infinitely enhanced Aesopian fable.”

In rescuing the poet, Nietzsche is unsettling the identity of Plato himself. For the Apollonian mask possesses an uncanny quality that disturbs this vision of who the philosopher thinks himself to be in this image of the radiant dream-prophet: “The divine Plato…speaks ironically of the poet’s creative power, in so far as it is not a conscious insight, and places it on a par with the gift of the soothsayer and oneiromancer, since the poet is capable of writing only once he is unconscious and all reason has left him.” The uncanny nature of the thinker—as poetic prophet of the dream world, as idealistic dreamer by day and by night, living in semblance—is making itself felt. With a mortal Plato and divine Apollo crossing this threshold of a luminous Schein, Plato’s identity is splitting, doubling; he is becoming uncanny, becoming the hermit, for whom Schein’s luminous inner presence is this strangely beautiful guest of the night.

Already, with this inner medium who communes with higher realities, we are closer to a conception of the uncanny nature of thought in the musical encounter. To more thoroughly prepare an understanding of music as this prophetic, shining image of truth, I would underscore Nietzsche’s pluralist meaning for a luminous Schein. Toward the care of the

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50 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 15.
51 Sallis, Crossings, 31.
52 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 68.
53 Ibid., 68–69.
54 Ibid., 64.
55 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 4.
soul, and against the suffering endemic to the body of time and life, both art (music) and dreams are like “sagacious” philosophy itself: performing the role of spiritual healer, they are mediums through which lovers of wisdom may commune with the object of their desire—truth. “The higher truth,” writes Nietzsche,

the perfection of those states in contrast to imperfectly comprehensible daily reality, the deep awareness of nature healing and helping in sleep and dreams, is at the same time the symbolic analogue of the soothsaying powers and of art in general, through which both life is made possible and worth living.\textsuperscript{56}

In the shining of dream images, in their outreach to the \textit{lover} of the dream world, Nietzsche insists that \textit{all} images are images of perfection, both the beautiful \textit{and} the ugly, the joyous \textit{and} the melancholy, the pleasurable \textit{and} the painful, for as an illumination—as the strangely familiar semblance to reality—their speaking of truth is the message through which we interpret life and which enables the creation of the self by the self.\textsuperscript{57} In this sense, \textit{to shine} is \textit{to speak}, and so to give the dreamer, the lover of illusion, a measure of \textit{self-knowledge}. In the Apollonian order of beautiful, shining dream images—and in their transfiguration as art and music—knowledge and vision are given as one, the ‘I’ and the ‘eye’ becoming synonymous with the pursuit and possession of wisdom.\textsuperscript{58} For Nietzsche, this pursuit is steeped in an ‘I’ that is as inescapable as the anthropomorphic ‘eye’ that comes to covet the realm of truth. As Richard Kurth writes, the Nietzschean reading of Apollonian wisdom conflates “this visual bias with an emphasis on the individual,”\textsuperscript{59} naming Apollo (after Schopenhauer) “the glorious divine image of the \textit{principium individuationis}, from whose gestures and looks all the delight, wisdom and beauty of ‘illusion’ speak to us.”\textsuperscript{60} Nietzsche insists that such gazing into the beautiful perfection of \textit{Schein} must be a gazing from a distance; one must preserve a certain reticence, without transgressing the boundary between such radiant semblance and its original model: rather than give oneself over to the affective force of semblance, one must remain present to the sensation of \textit{Schein}’s “shimmering betrayal,” however ephemeral, to grasp both its concealment \textit{and} revelation of truth.\textsuperscript{61} “[O]ur image of Apollo,” writes Nietzsche,
must incorporate the delicate line that the dream image may not overstep, without becoming pathological, in which case illusion would deceive us as solid reality; it needs that restraining boundary, that freedom from wilder impulses, that sagacious calm of the sculptor god.  

In the careful measure of oneself, in becoming Apollonian, one must become something like Schopenhauer’s boatman, who, secure in knowing himself, floats calmly, amidst the tempest of human suffering and excess that rages and howls all around him:

Apollo, as an ethical deity, demands moderation from his followers and, in order to maintain it, self-knowledge. And thus the admonitions ‘Know thyself’ and ‘Nothing in excess!’ co-exist with the aesthetic necessity of beauty…

For Nietzsche, this figure of restraint—who sees clearly, and stands calmly, and so preserves a serenity of self amidst and against the decadent world of illusory appearance—this is the artistic philosopher, the sleeper awake, the self-possessed thinker who creates his sage-like identity through Schein, who creates ideas and images of perfection to believe in. For Sallis, shining is the threshold upon which Apollo and Plato simultaneously meet and stand opposed, Nietzsche’s goal—to live in Schein, to create a philosophy that is an inverted Platonism—coming through this reading of Plato as Apolline artist:

Insofar as perfection is accorded to the image rather than the original, the Apollinian inverts, in advance of Platonism, the order of origination that Platonism will bequeath to the history of metaphysics…Hence…“the further removed from true being, the purer, the more beautiful the better it is. Living in shine as goal”… And yet, in opposing to the everyday a more perfect sphere that would be more representational rather than presentational, the Apollinian turns, in advance, in the same direction as Platonism. A certain solidarity remains even if what is opposed to the everyday is what is called idea. …what the Apollinian opposes to the everyday is the image, not the idea, and this opposition, this evaluation of the image-world over everyday actuality Nietzsche attributes to Plato the artist. Thus in a note from 1870–71: “That the world of representations is more real than actuality is a belief that Plato, as an artistic nature [als Kunstlernatur], set up theoretically.”…By stopping the turn short of the Platonist

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62 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 16.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 26.
order of origination, Nietzsche would rescue Plato the artist from the Platonic fable of the true
world, that is, from the history of metaphysics.  

Stilled by the principle of individuation, detached from his own wildness in knowing that
wildness belongs to the dark dream of everyday imperfection, beholding shining semblance
as the sign of true being, Plato becomes the divine artist of shining, thus becoming like
Apollo himself, a friend of the eide, the idea. Gazing serenely down at the bodies of
ordinary men, he sees them for the cave-prisoners they are.

Toward this conception of the philosopher-artist, perhaps we could also call him “Plato the
composer,” for this notion—that the shining image reveals an essential idea—is of decisive
importance to the Socratic image of a philosophy that is the ‘greatest’ music. It is to lead us
back to Socrates’ dream, the dream where music shines, where it takes the shape of a
beautiful shimmering illusion of the rational order of logos, the “hidden harmony of all
things.” It is also to lead us back to the inseparable problem of anthropomorphism. In this,
we are now closer to the question: who is the friend of wisdom, if not music? Though,
necessarily, it gives rise to another: what consolation is the friend of music, if not the
consolation of the mask of true being? Ultimately, if it is the consolation of an eternal truth
that Plato seeks—an almighty, luminous justification to the endless longing for
transcendental Being against the suffering, melancholy world of time—we might better
revisit his metaphysics of music through a reading that emphasises the anthropomorphism
endemic to Platonic thought, to ‘see’ more clearly what both Plato the dream-artist and the
forces of music are rescued from. Amidst this reading, my overarching aim is to self-
reflexively grasp the ways in which I myself, in the musical encounter, create and submit to
the beauty of the shining idea, where, through the friend of wisdom who wears the mask of
Apollo, music becomes the semblance of an ‘I’ with an ‘eye’—the mirror image of a
luminous, rational soul—satisfying, for a time, the impossibility to “know thyself” (to die, to
transcend, to possess love’s object) in the time of life.

66 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 15–16.
67 Plato, Phaedo 248a–249d; also in Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, see eidos 46–47; nous 133–34.
68 See the allegory of the cave in Plato, The Republic 514a–520a.
69 Turetzky, Time, 8. Also see Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, harmonia 74–75.
Plato and the Shining of Music

In keeping with a “rigid” Platonic dualism, let us return to the foundational problem of essence and appearance, where there are two worlds that divide the soul from the body: one, the immortal realm of Perfect Forms, true being, and spiritual freedom (death, eternity and the rational soul); the other, the mortal world of incarceration, of semblance and illusion (life, time and the body). In both worlds, thought, as Idea, extends “beyond the individual…. God’s creation of the soul of the world is said to precede the creation of the body and to be in a constant process of thinking about the sensible and intelligible world.”

For Plato, philosophy is a preparation for the immortality of death through the practice of soul-body separation, its purpose to care for and cure the soul against the decadence and irrationality of the body of semblance, against melancholy suffering and an unthinkable finitude. “To be dead,” writes Dastur, “is precisely what the philosopher prescribes, and, as Plato says explicitly: ‘Those who pursue philosophy rightly are practicing how to die, and there is no one in the world who is less afraid of death’ (Phaedo, 67e).” To pursue philosophy “rightly” also means to open the rational soul to that which it responds most virtuously. If the practice of philosophy aspires to become the “greatest music,” it is because it is the purest music with which the highest part of the soul—the intellect, the nous—authentically communes, ensuring, through its elevation beyond the temporal body of sorrow, the transcendence of thought into the “intemporality of the idea.” For the philosopher—the friend and lover of wisdom, who does not yet possess the wisdom to “know thyself”—a good, true and just music thus becomes the friend, consort and confessional with which he feels an intimate sense of belonging and longs to remain faithful. If the philosopher wears the mask of true being, is it not through this interlocutory “friendship” with a music whose solemn apothecary purpose is to heal the melancholy wounds of semblance? For if philosophy aspires to know the eternal realm of the unchanging Idea, and if to pursue philosophy “rightly” means to open the soul to that which it responds most positively, to make a friend of music means to make a friend of death itself, this very relation flowing

70 Pelosi, Plato on Music, Soul and Body, 3–5.
71 Cooper, The Soul of Film Theory, 9.
72 Dastur, Death, 21.
73 Pelosi, Plato on Music, Soul and Body, 6.
74 Dastur, Death, 21.
seamlessly back into a cosmology which is, unsurprisingly, as musical as it is anthropomorphic.

The magnitude with which music invokes the Apollonian mask of true being—and so becomes Plato’s friend of eternity—is difficult to grasp without registering the profound influence of the Pythagorean belief in a perfectly ordered musical cosmos. In this sense, earthly human music is the audible mirror to the inaudible, celestial order of the harmony of the spheres. For the Pythagoreans, both music and cosmos possess a temporal body (in music, the materiality of sounding tones; in the cosmos, the physicality of planets, moons, suns, and stars) and an invisible, eternal numerical essence which maintains the harmonic order of these bodies. As Ronald Bogue writes, the Pythagoreans “found both musical and numerical consonance in the movement of the planets, which, they claimed, emitted a celestial music as each sphere followed its perfectly proportioned course.” In this way, the perceptible forms of music and cosmos meet on the Pythagorean threshold of a perfectly proportioned system, number being “the generative force of all geometrical and physical forms”.

In the Timaeus, the profound influence of these ideas is energised and crystallised through the force of anthropomorphic thought. For Plato, the being of the number—as the eternal, abstract Idea made by the Intellect of the Demiurge (the divine Craftsman)—creates and sustains the harmonious beauty of a cosmos that is essentially musical via this numerical threshold. Bogue writes:

In the Timaeus, the connection between music, mathematics, and cosmology is elaborately developed, and the ontological status of the number, which remains uncertain in the Pythagoreans, is explicitly identified as ideal. In other dialogues, particularly the Republic, the concept of harmony is used to characterise psychological and social order, and philosophy itself is seen as a musical activity. As Edward Lippman observes, the entire Platonic enterprise may finally be conceived of as a form of music: “The musician creates harmony in the pitch and duration of tone and in gesture; man creates harmony in the conduct of his life;

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76 Bogue, Deleuze on Music, Painting, and the Arts, 15.
77 Ibid.
the statesman creates harmony in society; the Demiurge creates harmony in the cosmos; the philosopher creates the harmony of dialectic and the music of discourse.”

Let us add however, that if “the entire Platonic enterprise may finally be conceived of as a form of music,” the ontological status of music as this numerical ideal unwittingly forgets the extent to which Plato’s abiding attachment to the familiar animates his speaking of all ontological secrets. More-so than Bogue, though omitting the connection to music, Donald Zeyl clearly captures the humanising essence of Platonic thought, writing that the Idea of the cosmic order comes into being through the “deliberate intent of Intellect (nous), anthropomorphically represented by the figure of the Craftsman,” creating “the model for rational souls to understand and to emulate. Such understanding and emulation restores those souls to their original state of excellence, a state that was lost in their embodiment.”

Platonism then, with its much-critiqued religious overtones, is a project of mimetic doubling and a practice of resurrection, for the reclamation of a prior, original and unchanging truth to the rational soul of the self. Platonism is a requiem for the perfect Idea—the perfect thought—that sustains all of nature, including the centre of the self and this humanised cosmology: thought as a virtuous, pure music, Platonism is the retrieval of a great monumental Being, wrested from the shabby little dirge of “life” and thrust into the boughs of eternity’s euphoric symphony of harmonia.

Across Plato’s creationist-harmonic order of musicians, mortals, gods and thinkers, is there not, again, some deep confusion on the philosopher’s part regarding his presumed superiority to ordinary men: as the philosopher, he thinks himself quite unlike other political, rational animals; as The Thinker he distinguishes clearly between the semblance of the temporal world and the true being of eternity. Knowingly, reluctantly, the illuminated philosopher must continually descend into “the darkness where most people live” to participate in the politics of the world of appearances (semblance), the return “necessitated by the thinker’s inability to make his permanent home in the realm of the eternal, and to stay for any length of time in the light.”

Dastur writes,

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80 Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, see harmonia 74–75.
81 Dastur, Death, 22–23.
[T]here is no discourse about the true being of things, no ontology, except that which sets out from the situation of imprisonment within appearances. It is by becoming conscious of the limitations of his condition that the thinker is opened up to the unlimited, and is therefore able to see shadow as shadow without any longer confusing it with what true reality is. …This ‘double bind’, this double constraint of human thinking, at the same time transcendence of finitude and imprisonment in it, is what is expressed in various ways from one end of philosophy to the other, giving its own style to the philosophical statement which, arising neither out of scientific positivity nor out of poetic vision, simply gives voice to the tension that opposes and divides at one and the same time the finite and the infinite, the mortal and the immortal, and remains as such inseparable from the existential attestation of the person by whom it is formulated.  

While Dastur captures the thinker’s plight impeccably here, the problems of both music and anthropomorphism remain unspoken. Consequently, the idea that the philosopher may not be quite so different from those lesser mortals he distinguishes himself from is less apparent. If, for Plato, music is philosophy’s aspiration, and if music and philosophy are made to wear the mask of true being, these things must have a bearing on what may well be the uncanny nature of the philosopher: as someone who bears witness to the simultaneity of existential incarceration and freedom (and who longs for its transcendent resolution), and as someone who seeks above all to know himself through the shining of Schein, he is also the music-loving hermit whose inner friend constantly communes with the eide of the cosmos. To hear music speak the secret harmony of all things is to hear the secret soul of all things speak, to hear the divine Craftsman himself speak, for whoever “creates” wisdom knows wisdom. The mournful depths of the abyss become silent in the leap to love.

Are these not the secrets Plato chooses for the mystery of music, with the secret of his own soul calling back to him from its great Apollonian height? Is music not the shining image of the one perfect truth he seeks? A shining image of truth because, in the dream of music, what is revealed to Plato the artist, through his own love for the familiar—the human, the idea—is the true being of the cosmos. The evidence of this is all around him: in the human body that is the image of the human soul, in time that is “the moving image of eternity”, 83 in the body of

82 Dastur, Death, 23.
83 Turetzky, Time, 11–17.
earthly sounding music that is the temporal image of an immobile music of eternity… In these principle configurations of semblance and true being, in the endless desire to know, Plato’s abiding attachment to the familiar drives out the strangeness of music for the most utopian of self-portraits: what greater purpose for music than this unveiling of the divine within? Everything returns to the anthropological longing to know one’s own soul, everything turns on the desire for immortality, for in immortality, one keeps the inner friends one creates in life. And although the thinker desires the freedom of immortality, he does not desire to be free alone, he is still the creator of inner presences who speak to non-human things, he is still a plurality whose interior interlocutions lock out the oblivion of complete solitude. Never outside or beyond the self, music is always within him. As the soul of the universe and so philosophy’s aspiration, as the friend for thought, as the maker of the mask of true being, and in reciprocally wearing this mask of eternity, music is saturated in its human identity, especially in the creation of “God” as Nous, bringing the philosopher into the revelatory space within which, for a time, he transcends the life of the body and ascends to the realm of self-knowledge. In the mirror of music, the philosopher knows himself. For a time, he dies.

The Ancient Wisdom of Absurdity

It is here, within this image of the lover of wisdom who follows Apollo’s muse, that Nietzsche restores the prolific anthropomorphism endemic to Plato’s ancestry. The ancient Greek world is a tragic culture, a culture which believes in the necessity of metamorphic gods created in man’s own image, and created in response to the peculiarly human wisdom that compels the desire for immortality. For the ancients, Homer’s epic universe performs a rather different kind of apothecary role than the one of singular truth that Plato will later create through the very same dream-inspired images. As Dastur writes, it is in the mourning play of Greek Tragedy (“one of the first representations of the fundamentally mortal condition of humanity”), that Nietzsche finds

the combination of a consciousness of the horror of a human life destined for death and the dream of an Olympian world inhabited by gods. … it is the Greek who is most alert to the absurdity of existence… None of the cruelties of nature escape his notice. The Greek finds

85 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 10.
consolation neither in the idea of a posthumous world nor in the radiant face of the gods. He finds it solely in the lie of art which alone succeeds in saving him, since ‘the creation of the poet is nothing other than this shining image which nature offers us as a cure after we have looked into the abyss’. The truth is that it is human wisdom—in other words, knowledge of one’s own mortality—that constitutes this monstrosity which goes against the course of nature in plumbing its secret…What goes against nature in human existence is precisely that it is not a life that is absolutely alive, but a life that includes in itself a relationship with the world of the dead.86

Knowing his true nature, knowing the finitude of death, the ancient Hellene overcomes the absurdity of his life through Homer’s epic tales of immortality and metamorphosis, the poetic preservation of the gods’ creation the necessary shining through which life’s absurd theatre might glower back ruefully, ironically, satirically. Such existential absurdity is precisely what the anthropomorphic impulse rages against, what the dream world evacuates, and what Plato himself negates in the creation of the Demiurge. In rescuing “Plato the artist”, for whom the oracles of Apollo remain a guiding light, Nietzsche is in fact summoning the great Apollonian paradox of Platonic thought. Most certainly, “Apollo is the divine incarnation of the principle of individuation”,87 who

overcomes the suffering of the individual by means of the luminescent glorification of the eternity of the phenomenon; beauty triumphs over the suffering inherent in life; pain is, in a certain sense, deluded away from amongst the features of nature.88

Absolutely, this removal from nature’s ordeal through the dream of glorious eternity is nothing if not the Platonic consolation. Yet in miming the shining one who is the friend of the Demiurge, in favouring the Being of one Creator over the mortal creation of many gods, in projecting the essence of a perfect human reason into the musical cosmos, Plato fails to grasp the truly ironic nature of his own self-created plurality which, for Nietzsche, is the true nature of the solitude-seeking hermit. For flagrantly opposing this overcoming of suffering is the ancients’ heroic will to live, the resolutely Apollonian will to remain with the living, to endure the ordeal of suffering that Platonism necessarily transcends. “The same impulse,”

87 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 11 (italics added).
88 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 80.
writes Nietzsche, “that calls art into existence, the complement and apotheosis of existence, also created the Olympian world with which the Hellenic ‘will’ held up a transfiguring mirror to itself:

Thus the gods provide a justification for the life of man by living it themselves. …It is not unworthy of the greatest of all heroes to long for a continuation of life, even as a day labourer. The ‘will’, at the Apolline stage, longs so impetuously for life, and Homeric man feels so at one with it that even lamentation becomes his song of praise.89

Derailing the Socratic image of a philosopher who desires the soul-body separation of death, Apollo’s paradoxical purpose further disturbs a consistent interpretation of the superior Platonic aspiration for ideality. With Apollo presiding over this heroic longing for life, the status of philosopher, artist and labourer (the ordinary human who lives in the shadows of semblance) is levelled. Surely Apollo only exists to show Plato what he himself is; a lover and sufferer of life, nature and time, a lover and sufferer of the self and of music, who thus wills the idea of eternity so as to continue to live amongst these things, in their utter perfection, beyond the bounds of finitude.

The Mask of Apollo: My Shining Friend

Is this the voice of my own inner Plato, groping madly through dreams of Apollonian images to thwart the very real possibility that music itself is somehow meaningless? In believing music to possess some “sayable secret” do I not also appeal to a mask that authorises the enlightening Idea, that affirms music as familiar and so imminently thinkable, knowable, nameable? Consoled by my friend, and sensing the deep mystery of music spoken only to me, am I not, in fact, summoning this radiant stranger within, this idealist, whose will I forever fail to notice? In losing myself in the poetic “truth” of music, in feeling entirely and ecstatically at one with this divine “something”, do I not also—however absurdly—forget the well-founded suspicions of my atheistic instincts?

However great I thought the distance between the mutilating forces of essentialism and my own ambivalence, I see how it is that I commit this very same gesture toward music’s mystery. In loving the feeling of sadness that music doubles, I thought music was privately,

89 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 23.
lovingly speaking the secret of sadness. I thought music my melancholy friend, yet the friend of music—the inner presence who gives music this voice through which to speak, and who reciprocally gives me a thought to speak—has conspired against me to conjure this mask of “true being.”…”Who is the friend of wisdom, if not music”? Music, big with secrets, mocks my desire. Thought leaps to its lover.

Recalling Jankélévitch, however, music does not speak or think or know; these are nonsensical claims that he has already demolished with devastating precision. I have forgotten the truth of ineffable truth. I meant to preserve the mystery of music, not covet the familiar to the degree that all otherness, illusion, and strangeness is annihilated. I need to pierce the mask of true being, the mask who sees only the beauty of the idea and the permanence of thought. For thought is the problem: in groping through the threshold of Schein that simultaneously unites and ruptures the figures of Plato and Apollo, in attempting to grasp the sheer multivalence that characterises thought, I realize that in the moment of the musical encounter, I am a strange version of Cobussen’s nomad after-all, rapturous rather than ruptured, wandering between purely imaginary delusions and rationalised beliefs. Between the poetic Apollonian dream image which consumes Platonic logic, and the Platonic Idea of Eternity reciprocally inspired by the shining of Apollo, music is drowning in the consolations of a philosophy that relentlessly secures the familiarity of anthropomorphic thought. The mystery which hinges on the knife edge of a great ineffable truth and the absurdity of existence resolves through thought’s cunning to see only itself.

Thought is in need of an intervention. For in loving music’s mystery, surely I seek the strangeness of music, for in strangeness is all the otherness, appearance, and semblance that opposes thought’s unchecked arrogance. And what is more strange and unsettling to Plato-the-thinker than this other kind of semblance that opposes true being—the artistic force of nature, the corrosive time of life, the otherness of the ecstatic, intoxicated body, the incomparable realm of feeling that music awakens, but further, the idea of death without the consolation of eternal light; the dark death of a corpse whose home is deep inside the earth rather than above in the heavens? For I do not want Nietzsche to think me a “despisers of the body”, however much a thinking of music compels me to make of my body a stranger. And here it is that I make a second blunder in my continuing confusion between affective forces

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and essential meanings. I say to myself, thinking I am outfoxing thought itself, thinking I am overcoming myself, “If music does not think or speak, does it not then feel?”

**Nietzsche: The Friend of Feeling and the Mask of Dionysus**

In and of itself, music is not so full of meaning for our inner life, so profoundly moving, that it can claim to be a direct language of emotion. Rather, it is its ancient connection to poetry that has invested rhythmic movement, loudness and softness of tone, with so much symbolism that we now believe music is speaking directly to the inner life and that it comes out of it. …No music is in itself deep and full of meaning. It does not speak of the “will” or the “thing in itself.” Only in an age that had conquered the entire sphere of inner life for musical symbolism could the intellect entertain this idea. The intellect itself has projected this meaning into sound…

—Friedrich Nietzsche

If Plato is sick with longing to return to the realm of perfection, and if it is the great music of philosophy that makes such belonging more familiar, what is it that Nietzsche desires within the world of philosophy and music? Surely to be a stranger to the Platonic definition of wisdom and a friend to the kinds of music Socratically despised, to rival the thinkable idea with the body’s affective feeling, to be both the artist and the work of art rather than the thinker Plato prefers, and most forcefully, to violently unveil the uncanny nature of creation, that which lies beneath the shroud of the radiant divine?

If Plato is practicing how to die, Nietzsche is practicing how to live.

If Plato calls for the ascetic care and liberation of the immortal soul through an austere musical philosophy, Nietzsche petitions the urgent reawakening and excitation of a mortal spiritual body through a music that symbolically expresses, to a supreme degree of intensity, the entire flux of feeling that is this mortal coil of life’s suffering, thus giving something altogether new to philosophy—the potency, legitimacy and critical potentiality for a more original and archaic sense of living in semblance. Toward the utter strangeness of semblance in all its Dionysian intensity, Nietzsche longs for philosophy to love the body through the

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93 Ibid., 21.
death of thought, and to know the absurd truth to life through a music that celebrates and compels a return to the artistic forces of the earth.

Dionysus, the River of Lethe and the Myth of Er

That I might be revealed on earth for what I am:
A god.

—Euripides, The Bacchae

Dionysus…god of “wine and intoxication, of ritual madness and ecstatic liberation from everyday identity…god of the theatre and impersonation, the theatrical mask being the symbol of this transformation of identity.” To soothe sadness, to exile thought, to become someone other than the self one “knows”….The Dionysian offering of wine “banishes the sufferings of wretched mortals,” writes Euripides, “and brings forgetfulness of each day’s troubles in sleep. There is no other cure for sorrow…” Haunted by the world’s willing, striving, suffering and dying, archaic man feels the truth of his life too intensely. He is sick with wisdom. He longs to forget. He creates gods to forget, but, most especially, creates one god in particular within which the grave burden of humanity is shouldered, sheltered and darkly doubled. Not unlike Plato’s practice of soul-body separation, the rite of self-forgetting and erasure rehearses a more final forgetting, the masks, mimes, and doublings of Dionysus flouting such finality beneath the veil of rebirth and reinvention.

As in life, so too in death, archaic man drinks to forget, to sleep, and to awaken into a new life. To return to the living, to play out life’s pantomime in the costume of a new body, the souls of the dead must drink from the waters of Lethe, the River of Oblivion, one of the five rivers that run through the Underworld. Upon drinking, the soul sleeps: upon awakening, it lives the destiny written into its new body. In The Republic, the river of Lethe is central to Plato’s Myth of Er, where the proof of immortality, afterlife, and the soul’s endlessly forgotten eternal return to life is inscribed through a figure who is forbidden to forget, and who is nothing if not a (pre-)Christomorphic emblem for the disciples of a pre-Christian philosophy. Er, a soldier, dies in battle, his body placed upon the funeral pyre, his soul

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94 Euripides, The Bacchae 19–20, quoted in Sallis, Crossings, 44.
95 March, Classical Myths, 100.
96 Euripides, The Bacchae 278–83, quoted in March, Classical Myths, 100.
97 March, Classical Myths, 107.
98 Plato, The Republic 614a–621d.
leaving his corpse to cross-over into Hades. There, Er is chosen by the Judges of souls to be “a messenger to men about the other world.”99 He is forbidden to choose his new life in the way that other souls, both human and creaturely, both just and unjust, are invited to choose a body. Denied such metamorphosis, Er is also forbidden to drink the soporific waters of “the Forgetful River,”100 so that, memory preserved, he might return to his undecomposed body, and reveal to mortal men the secret of the afterlife. Er describes the judicial orders of reward and retribution in the afterworld; its glorious, heavenly realm for the good souls, and its punishing earthly chasm for the perpetrators of evil. For Socrates, Er’s message is one of hope for the lovers of wisdom, a message that confirms both the immortality of the soul, and the intimate communion between morality, abstinence and wisdom: “And so…[Er’s] tale was preserved from perishing, and, if we remember it, may well preserve us in turn. And we shall cross the river of Lethe safely and shall not defile our souls.”101 As Sallis insists, Plato’s account of Er’s crossing—this resurrection of a man who bears witness to memory’s endless emptying out through the intoxications of Lethe—could not have eluded Nietzsche,102 for whom self-forgetting marks the nature of the Dionysian ordeal, becoming the means with which to celebrate a Schein that is more “organic” than Apollonian shining, and more conscionable than Er’s monotheistic allusions.

The link between Dionysus and Lethe is in no way tenuous when thought through the ancients’ common belief that the god of wine, nature and masks also doubles the god of the Underworld: “But Hades is the same as Dionysos,” writes Heraclitus, “for whom they rave and act like bacchantes.”103 For Nietzsche, this uncanny doubling of Dionysus and Hades, their strange complicity as one and the same god, helps confirm nature’s own creative, destructive, and regenerative life-force, overwhelming Plato’s luminous, celestial afterworld, and rivalling the figure of Christ himself:

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99 Plato, The Republic 614d.
100 Ibid., 621a–b.
101 Ibid., 621c.
102 Sallis, Crossings, 1–2.
Dionysus versus the “Crucified”…The god on the cross is a curse on life, a signpost to seek redemption from life; Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction.104

We are returning to Nietzsche’s appeal for living in Schein, within which music is central, and where a philosophy of the future must not only challenge and overcome Platonic idealism, but overcome the annihilating forces of its formidable offspring Christianity, the “Platonism for ‘the people’.”105 As Deleuze writes of Nietzsche’s philosophy in general, it is an appeal for pluralism, rather than monism:

Pluralism is the properly philosophical way of thinking, the one invented by philosophy; the only guarantor of freedom in the concrete spirit, the only principle of a violent atheism. The Gods are dead, but they have died from laughing, on hearing one God claim to be the only one, “Is not precisely this godliness, that there are gods but no God?”106

For Nietzsche, so taken with the force of Dionysus, this is the god who embodies (rather than illuminates) Schein, who cleaves open the wounds of existential pain, and whose shadowy strangeness is the more genuine consolation than the ascetic light of familiarity so dear to Platonism and Christianity. Necessarily, the tomes and societies of utopian transcendentalism remain antithetical to a spirit who embodies the strangeness of uncanny doubling, and who affirms the willing for the “eternal return” to the suffering world of semblance. As Royle writes, “What is ‘uncanny’ is what does not ‘seem to come in God’s name’.”107 This is also the god whose spirit in music gifts the river of Lethe to the living through music, anaesthetising the horrors of absurdity and satisfying the “ardent longing for illusion”108 through music’s own spiritual crossing from life to death and back again.

The Night Spirit of Music: Love’s Body

Night has come; only now all the songs of lovers awaken. And my soul too is the song of a lover.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

That Lethe’s destruction of memory is both a blessing (anaesthetizing the truth of life’s suffering) and a curse (erasing the memory of a glorious afterlife), is also testimony to the Dionysian spirit, who expresses humanity’s dual cruel and gentle nature, the willing of both life and death. This is the lesson of Euripides’ homage to Dionysus in The Bacchae, where the debaucheries of bacchanal fanatics reveal humanity’s grotesque duplicity: lost to bestial carnality, compelled to follow love’s desire, acquiescent to the killing instinct, though gentle in its creaturely love, the human condition is this ceaseless reckoning with the will, this compulsion to drink madly from the vial of life even as it dismembers and destroys this same life. As Sallis writes, the doubling of Dionysus is “the return of the repressed in all its power”. Thus for Nietzsche, it is this Dionysian spirit—this joyous, rebellious, ruthless, ecstatic, tragic spirit—that pervades the living, and it is through its symbolic expression as music that the radiant veil of Apollo falls away to reveal the uncanny force—“the spirit of music”—that lies darkly beneath it. Recall Deleuze and Guattari: “Music is never tragic, music is joy. But there are times it necessarily gives us a taste for death… Music has a thirst for…destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation.” Figuratively, poetically, existentially, Dionysus is the night spirit who awakens the dead within, to trouble the light of reason.

Recalling the Wagnerian-Schopenhauerian grounding of The Birth of Tragedy (where music copies an eternally striving will that precedes reason), Nietzsche’s return to pre-Socratic mythology lends music’s mystery all the more to the problem of language that permeates the uncanny. Ever beyond the logocentric order of saying through its mirroring of the poetic enigmas of the inner self, the force which compels life communes with the strangely familiar forces of music on this threshold of the inexpressible. Through music’s hypnotic rhythms, the emotional power of tone, the “unified flow of melody and the utterly incomparable world

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110 Sallis, Crossings, 2, 5, 42–50.
111 Ibid., 43.
112 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 299.
113 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 34–35.
of harmony” comes, for Nietzsche, the glorification of Dionysian suffering and ecstasy, where all of (human) nature’s feeling—love, hope, desire, sorrow, vengeance, futility, anguish, regret—is symbolically expressed, and uncannily felt. In music’s doubling of feeling, the *rational* self is forgotten. With the annihilation of the *principium individuationis*, comes the ecstatic return to primal Oneness. In the restoration to the artistic (creative) forces of living, breathing Mother Nature herself, comes a more original, exhilarating, and utterly mortuary kind of familiarity and belonging. Only in the mirrors of music, in the symbolic expression of the entire life of feeling—the uninhibited, unveiled presence of the body, the emotional soul, the heart, which is the will of Nature herself—can the tragic ordeal of absurdity be ecstatically overcome:

Only from the spirit of music can we understand delight in the destruction of the individual. For only in single instances of such destruction can we clearly see the eternal phenomena of Dionysiac art, which expresses the will in its omnipotence, behind the *principium individuationis*, the eternal life that lies beyond the phenomenal world, regardless of all destruction.

This dark stranger within the self, incarnate as “the musical symbol of the will,” is, for Deleuze, the affirmation of life, “the *affirmative* and *affirming* god”, who asserts “the pains of *growth* rather than reproducing the sufferings of *individuation*. He is the god who affirms life, for whom life must be affirmed, but not justified or redeemed” in the way that the figure of *Christ* provides transcendental justification and redemption. Surely, the death of God which later compels Nietzsche’s Zarathustra—whom Nietzsche later names “the Dionysiac monster”—is already inscribed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, however much Nietzsche believes that this first work “remains silent about Christianity, it has not *identified* Christianity.” For even in this first opposition of an earthly Dionysus and a heavenly Apollo, the younger Nietzsche is calling for a belief in music’s reckoning to the inevitable truth of life, demanding of philosophy a faith in music’s power to overcome the individual will’s great nemesis *death*, death now understood through the pall of time’s mortality, through the absence of otherworldly transcendence, and as a going deep down within an earth that itself *wills* life

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115 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 20–21.
116 Ibid., 79–80.
118 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 12.
into being.\textsuperscript{120} As the musical spirit of earth’s body—as willing’s uncanny, \textit{sonorous} double—the music of Dionysus is, like Apollo’s shining dream image, a necessary illusion: rather than opening the self to the stasis of contemplation, and to an impossible idealism, Dionysian music returns humanity to the urgent flux—the “rich and triumphant existence”\textsuperscript{121}—from which it comes.

For Nietzsche, it is the medium of the Dionysiac musician that gifts the ancients this wisdom, providing solace and healing through “the gospel of world harmony,” and rescuing the Hellene from himself.\textsuperscript{122} “The satyr, the Dionysiac chorist” of Attic tragedy, writes Nietzsche, “lives in a world granted existence under the religious sanction of myth and ritual. That tragedy begins with him, that the Dionysiac wisdom speaks through him,” provides a great “consolation to the Hellene…whose piercing gaze has seen to the core of the terrible destruction of world history and nature’s cruelty,”\textsuperscript{123} and who bears witness to the absurd truth to life: in death, there is no divine realm, no afterlife, no beyond. Armed with such truth, the melancholy Dionysian is not unlike Hamlet:

[B]oth have truly seen to the essence of things, they have \textit{understood}, and action repels them; for their action can change nothing in the eternal essence of things, they consider it ludicrous or shameful that they should be expected to restore order to the chaotic world. Understanding kills action, action depends on a veil of illusion—this is what Hamlet teaches us…longing passes over the world towards death, beyond the gods themselves…. ‘Beyond’, is denied. Aware of truth from a single glimpse of it, all man can now see is the horror and absurdity of existence…. Here, in this supreme menace to the will, there approaches a redeeming, healing enchantress—\textit{art}. She alone can turn these thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence into ideas compatible with life: these are the \textit{sublime}—the taming of horror through art; and \textit{comedy}—the artistic release from the repellence of the absurd.\textsuperscript{124}

Here lies the apothecary purpose of the ancient choral satyr—the one who wears the mask of Dionysian transformation, who performs the dark, magical mirage of tragic music, who becomes the darker double of melancholy man against the lie of a culture madly in love with

\textsuperscript{120} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 22–23.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 17–18.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 38–39.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 39–40.
the false medicine of utopian dreams. Against such elitist imposture Nietzsche reclaims the satyr as

the archetype of man, the expression of his highest and most intense emotions, an inspired reveller enraptured by the closeness of his god, a sympathetic companion in whom god’s suffering is repeated, the harbinger of wisdom from the very breast of nature…something divine and sublime; he must have seemed particularly so to the painfully broken gaze of Dionysiac man…the audience of the Attic tragedy discovered itself in the chorus of the orchestra…

Thus, as the friend of Dionysus who doubles the dual nature of mankind, the satyr is equally the friend of life and death, and so the friend of the earth: these are the masks that music now wears, with the music-lover lost in the crowd of belonging that this semblance of Oneness unites. In music’s uncanny doubling of a more primal soul, Dionysiac man communes with death, comes closer to knowing the feeling of death without dying, and without condemning himself either to the illusions of a higher redemption or to the finality of absolute self-destruction. In taking the uncanny to its limit, perhaps it is also possible to think that in these consolations of ecstatic communion, Dionysian man realizes himself as uncanny: he realizes his utter nostalgia for the essence of himself, his inviolable homesickness to “return to an inorganic state,” to die, to become absorbed into the greater unifying forces of the earth, but to miraculously resurrect himself through the ecstasy that such proximity to death brings: in surrendering to the unification of music, in becoming the friend of Dionysus through music’s closeness to Dionysian earth, one is absolved to die over and again, to drink from music’s Lethe, and to—tragically and ecstatically—eternally return.

Conclusion: A Weeping Song, the Belonging of Death, a Friend for the Spectre

Beyond the utopian transcendentalism of Platonism, is this other kind of death—this drinking of a musical Lethe for the Dionysian forgetting of the self—a more authentic rendering of my own longing to know music’s secret? For surely music’s strange familiarity is bound within this more primal artistic willing which precedes and persuades the thought that Plato esteems. Far better to resurrect this ancient human wisdom, and be the friend of a music of the earth,

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125 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 40–44.
126 Ibid., 40–41.
than to be the wide-eyed follower of this high philosopher who needs a music of the spheres and despises the body of life. ...better to befriend this Dionysian Zarathustra—who lets me live my death through music recurringlly, and who, through my own willing, celebrates the melancholy joy of earthly belonging and metamorphosis—than the false friend of a Socratic recluse who thinks me too low to be a friend of the *eide*.

As death’s companion, the consolation of music has the epic reach of one particular anthropological rite to support it. In all its strangeness, otherness, and semblance of feeling, music remains the natural claimant to the rites of the funeral, laying the body to rest, returning the corpse to the earth, sending the body down below. Not so that it replaces feeling where now there is none, but so as to be the friend of death in a different sense, to bear witness to the ordeal of crossing, to restore to the living the poignancy and authority of feeling, and to console our proximity to death with the force that most closely mirrors it. As the spirit of Dionysus, as the friend of the spectre, all music is, in some sense, a euphoric weeping song, a departure and a return, a requiem for the undead, haunted as it is by both the memory and forgetting of feeling. And in just the same sense, music remains the natural claimant for the life of feeling through the rites of the dance, of every kind of dance, bound as it is to the decomposing nature of time’s body, the body who, like music, affirms this more organic form of eternity and who goes beyond the categories of good and evil. 128

Is there no stranger secret for music than this?

Music—whose doubling of life and death incarnates the immediacy of *feeling* rather than a purely contemplative *knowing* or *speaking*, whose world is of the order of *mythos* rather than *logos*—must accordingly be my body’s lover rather than my “platonic” friend of rational thought. The charm of music’s doubling creates strange crossings. But then, through this bizarre series of identity crises, through my ensemble of inner others, it becomes a vanishing as well as a crossing. Seduced by the music of Lethe, drunk on the mystery of the ineffable, I forget Nietzsche’s distinctions. I lose the boundary between mimesis and metamorphosis, between this world and the kingdom of shadows, between real feeling and feeling’s echo, between the ontological and the affective. A crossing from shore to shore does not exist. There are no longer shores upon which to stand and be still. There is no longer a difference

between the world of appearance and its musical illusion as the “symbolic expression” of the will: the “illusion of illusion” becomes the true being of feeling. In the annihilation of the suffering of individuation, in the moment of experience, I believe music and feeling to be one and the same thing. In this unmediated, ineffable communion, music lives and dies, it becomes organic, biological: more than merely an echo of feeling, it is feeling itself, more than a mirror to the self, it is sentience itself. It is a beautiful and necessary lie, this music that allows me to live in Schein. In love with its secret, and no good at deception, I am caught between the desire to reveal the musical mystery and the cardinal rule of friendship—to keep the secret hidden, the secret which music speaks to me alone and is for me alone to feel.

If, for Nietzsche’s ancient man, wisdom is the unadorned awareness of an absurd life, and if music’s illusions compel the forgetting of this truth, am I more like this ancient Hellene who loves and shudders, rather than the hermit who thinks and speaks (of God) much too much? If it is a case of choosing between the ascetic ideal and the artistic will, I choose the mask which elevates the lie of art to its “highest affirmative power”: in choosing for myself an artistic will, so too do I choose for music an artistic will. Thus here again, is the ironic anthropomorphic impulse that compels thought’s leap. Though the object of my love changes, the desire to overcome absurdity and claim immortality remains the same. I still long to see myself in the musical mirror. In the canny exchange of thought for feeling, I am still the hermit who remains faithful to the privileged idea, trading one name for another, renouncing one kind of human essence for another. In abandoning Plato’s Ideal cosmic belonging for an earthly primal Oneness, in the nostalgia for unity, the meaning of music is still buried within the order of the familiar. And while it may be enough to name the familiar as human, what human looks into a mirror without seeking, narcissistically, to ‘know thyself’—as body, mind and/or soul—amidst the strangeness of semblance? Such is the absurdity of my shedding one mask for another, for in exchanging thought for feeling I am no closer to the truth of music’s mystery. In either instance, Jankélévitch’s “ineffable truth” is being fraternised, socialised, and unified. In destroying music’s freedom, have I not simply borrowed a more controversial title through this more controversial Dionysian religion? The humanisation of music is, in the end, the death of love’s object, the death of mystery. I am

still the hermit whose mask of true being refuses to be quiet, even as it attempts to silence itself in becoming the mask of semblance.

This is the narcissistic length with which anthropomorphic thought will go. This is the work of desire as it leads thought astray, as it sidles in to appropriate, overthrow, and undermine the unsayable with saying, as it suffocates the musical mystery with a claustrophobic costume that is unrelentingly human. This is the lament devised by my friend with two faces, my friend who cannot help but leap to knowing to save me and my others from the abyss of unknowing and un-belonging through the masks that remain human. I am the hermit who thinks myself a seer of the pantomime of life, yet who is nonetheless addicted to the pantomime. I play the narcissistic role of rescuer, redeemer and justifier. I save music from the oblivion of incertitude. In artistically willing music’s sentience into being, I rescue myself. “Death is big,” writes Rilke,

We belong to it,
With laughing mouth,
When we believe ourselves to be in the depths of life,
It ventures to shed tears
Deep in us.¹³¹

As with death, so too with music; it belongs to us as we belong to it. Or rather, music, like life and feeling, belongs to death. And like the spectre in film, music belongs to a death that refuses to remain dead. Like the spectre in film, music bears witness to the incertitude of existential crossing. Like the spectre in film, music’s uncanny doubling wanders between life and death, thought and feeling, the light and the dark. Like the spectre in film, music moves between time and eternity. Like death, the meaning of music can never be known; it is unthinkable.¹³² If, as Dastur wonders, death and godliness meet on this threshold of the unknowable, music (like the spectre in film) may also be thought as

¹³² Dastur, Death, 4.
an unthinkable and uncircumscribable ‘object’ over which no mastery is ever possible and whose all-powerfulness over us resembles that of a unique god. …knowledge of death is absolutely certain knowledge…because it exposes us to the immeasurability of something we can never experience. This absolute magnitude of the dimension of the divine borrows *everything* from the absolute magnitude and total impenetrability of death.133

Thus, like death, music keeps its friends close and its secrets closer. Together, music and the cinematic spectre join with “divinity and death” as “essentially inseparable.”134 Only in this sense—in this realization of the necessity of these existential doublings, and the absurdity of a life *without* music (that is, without the consolation of death’s artistic ‘godliness’) —might this process enable an ironic glimpse at the *serious* self, if for no other reason than to ruefully reconcile the impulse to illuminate the secret meaning of musical mystery, to make a friend for the self and the spectre, to humanise music to this grave extent, and in so doing, annihilate the horrors of eternal solitude.

133 Dastur, *Death*, 4.
134 Ibid.
Chapter Three: Rethinking Music’s Utopian Desire through the Cinematic Body of Light

Between Heaven and Earth: A Spiritual Nowhere

Utopia is essential for the creative moment. Without it the present is unthinkable, unliveable, creatively undoable. …Utopia enables us to live. Not perversity. Not cynicism.

—Henri Cartier-Bresson

Unity, truth and goodness are the same thing, and above them there is nothing.

—Marsilio Ficino

I am—man is—a calling into question of what we are, of individual being where it is—a limitless calling into question, or being, insofar as it becomes self-questioning.

—Georges Bataille

“How,” asks Cobussen, “after ‘the Death of God,’ to give the still valuable concept of spirituality a meaningful interpretation…” More precisely, Cobussen is asking if it is possible, in our secularised and “diseenchanted” modern world, to rethink the spiritual meaningfulness of music beyond monotheistic consolations of the transcendentental divine. Less concerned with “what the spiritual dimension of music might be,” Cobussen speculates on “where this spiritual dimension might be situated”: where might the spirituality of music exist if not within the secure cosmological boundaries established and preserved by a belief in the mystery of ‘God’? And who, and then which aspect of the self, might have access or entry to such a space that Cobussen will come to call, after Foucault, Barthes and Bataille, “an a-topia, literally a non-place…” “a refuge” “where Western thought breaks down…the non-

4 Cobussen, Thresholds, 25.
5 Ibid., 30–31.
6 Ibid., 47.
space of spirituality, spirituality as an encounter with the inhuman…a radical otherness [which] recognizes and affirms the empty space, left behind after ‘the death of God’ “?”

How to begin to think this musical atopia that marks an “encounter with the inhuman”, and then, how to preserve its integrity in the presence of the cinematic human figure? If music is thought to possess a supremely human identity, how might Cobussen’s non-site of spirituality allow us to think beyond the limits of the human without crossing over and entering the realm of the transcendental divine? This question of the spiritual where, as Cobussen rethinks it, has singular influence for how I would seek to present a more elemental, or cosmic, rendering of the spiritual bond between music and the cinematic human figure, through the physicality of the musical tone and cinematic light, both of which invoke the mode of utopian desire. The complexity of such a bond might rival even that of the uncanny’s animistic archaism, as it now converges with a decidedly monotheistic construct which, for Royle, remains necessarily outside of, or resistant to, the uncanny’s established psychoanalytical framework:

What is ‘uncanny’ is what does not ‘seem to come in God’s name’. …the strangeness of the uncanny offers, demands or presupposes a new way of thinking about religion. It is, in fact, one of the unstated assumptions of Freud’s essay that the uncanny is to be theorized in non-religious terms. The experience of the uncanny, as he seeks to theorize it, is not available or appropriate to, say, a Jewish or Christian ‘believer’. …With a belief in God or some ‘evil Will’ or a variety of divine ‘Beings’, the uncanny does not even rear its eerie head …. Tempered by reason, Christian belief is the basis of everything. Such is the condition of what is known as the European Enlightenment.

In response to this distinction, the focus of this chapter shifts from the anthropomorphic to the cosmomorphic, and from mythological archaism to Christian mysticism. In so doing, I hope to enable a pathway to rethink this seemingly clear line between utopian desire and the uncanny—between the stable world of religious belief, and the unstable world of uncanny strangeness—to continue to develop a sense of both the spiritual complexity of music, and a liminal mode of cinematic spirituality that moves ambivalently between pre-Christian archaism and Christian mysticism.

7 Cobussen, Thresholds, 48–49.
8 Royle, The Uncanny, 20–21.
9 To reiterate the introduction, for the interrelation between anthropomorphism and cosmomorphism as “anthropo-cosmomorphism” see Morin, The Cinema of the Imaginary Man, 69–86.
While Cobussen’s atopia will ultimately open out the possibility of such a (non)space, some careful qualifications are needed to establish the conceptual connections that lead into it. This elemental bond between the cinematic human figure and music speaks to a sacred cosmological belief system, one that is incompatible with the mode of the uncanny. In kind, the ontological, affective and symbolic components of this union are, not insignificantly, the direct inversion of those intrinsic to the uncanny: as we shall soon see, Gorky’s shadowy, archaic spectre has its luminous, sacred other in a figure that we might most appropriately call the cinematic body of light. However apparently dialectical, this transformation of ontology—from shadow spectre to light spirit—calls up a remarkable convergence between archaic polytheism and traditional mysticism that embodies the problem of complexity itself: in this chapter, doubling will become entangled with the duality of essentialism, “the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness”\(^\text{10}\) that Royle deems the province of the uncanny will become imbricated with the mystery of God, the anthropo- substance of our primary relation—the cinematic human figure and anthropomorphic musical meaning—will begin to slip and fragment through this movement into the vibrational, atmospheric elements of the cosmos. In the differences between mystical theology, an archaic Homeric spirituality, and the nomadic sense that Cobussen will theorise through the liminality of a postmodern atopia, language also remains a recalcitrant obstacle. Fitting the mould of neither a ‘pure’ metaphysics of presence or its deconstructed indeterminacy, the cinematic body of light appears to inhabit perhaps the most extreme sense of an unthinkable, unsayable, liminal space, one that is somewhere and nowhere, and one which, in claiming the physical elements of the cosmos for its bond, disperses the mode of the ineffable across two divergent and decisively negative senses of spirituality; one which is inscribed within mystical theology’s doctrine of the negative divine, and an ‘other’ which emerges within Cobussen’s nomadic spirituality. How do we begin to think the where of the ineffable as a problem that enfolds the dual articulations of human and inhuman, place and non-place, space and non-space, a somewhere and a nowhere, a something and a nothing, and as both and neither at one and the same time?

I wonder if grasping this unfamiliar spiritual crossing is possible only by passing this elemental bond through the utopian longing that irrupts in the presence of the ineffable, so that we might ask not only how the cinematic human figure moves beyond anthropological

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\(^{10}\) Royle, *The Uncanny*, 2.
boundaries, but also _where_ it moves within an imaginary cosmological cartography. In other words, as territorial concepts that characterise this new threshold, how does the difference between an _atopian nowhere_ and a _utopian elsewhere_ (or ‘otherworld’) relate to a convergence between ‘The Ineffable’ of God and ‘the ineffable’ of a less certain mode of spirituality, and how does this manifold transform the ontology of the cinematic human figure?

Like the uncanny, the mode of utopian desire unfurls its own strata of indeterminacy, paradox and ambiguity, reciprocating a theory of spiritual complexity through a circular return to intellectually rigorous questions. However fatiguing, this new mode thus allows us to contemplate the innately _plural_ possibilities of the space between musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, and to go beyond the consolations of an _archaic_ sensibility that frees ‘spirituality’ from the institutionalisation of monotheistic faith and the craving for logical resolution. In remaining present to the predicament of our own paradoxically post-religious/post-secular time, I suggest that an uncanny conception of spirituality is but _one_ intervention among _many_ possibilities, and to locate further complexities requires a return to Christian mysticism, as Cobussen himself does. The reason for this is significant, and cannot be evaded: music has long been the province of religion as _the_ medium for spiritual atonement and rejuvenation through ritualistic, ecstatic, and meditative practice. A postmodern spirituality of cinema cannot consider itself somehow emancipated or removed from the millennia of music’s sacred ordination that precedes it without, in some way, attending to its ideological obstacles. Thus, how might we begin to think a new sense of this cinematic spirituality through the shifting boundaries in musical and mystical discourse, so as to, like Cobussen himself, respond _empathetically_ to the ordeal involved in relinquishing the consolations of religion?

With these qualifications in place, we might finally ask; _where_ is this _other_ cinematic human figure—this _cinematic body of light_—who would not only challenge the indeterminate complexity of the uncanny spectre, but _also_ rival its unquestionable “human-ness”? Once more, this question is less the mounting of a challenge against the significance of the archaic double, and more an _extension_ of its elemental possibilities for thinking the plurality of cinematic spirituality. For in experimental films such as Maya Deren’s _The Very Eye of Night_
(1958), and Norman McLaren’s *Pas de Deux* (1968), an ‘other’ spiritual figure does in fact exist, a *luminous* spirit-figure that floats and drifts in Deren’s nocturnal night-sky, a *radiant, angelic* figure who dissolves and morphs in the aether of McLaren’s impenetrable abyss. I suggest that, both literally and symbolically, this ethereal figure resists the uncanny identity of Gorky’s spectre: in no “disturbingly undead” sense could it join the ranks of Hades’ shadows, silhouettes, doubles and spectres for the sake of affirming its archaic identity. Rather, just as music is the real presence of sonorous tone, this luminous figure *is* what it *presents*: it is the real presence of *light*, imbued with all the symbolism of goodness and truth that light historically bears. I wonder whether this radiant figure is precisely the presence who would radically disturb, and potentially undermine, the progressive liminalist theory of, what we might tentatively call, an archaic-postmodern spiritual sensibility. If the “lifedeath” or “presence-absence” of the uncanny spectre *displaces* the traditional Platonic-Christian stability of the cosmological zones of life and death, how would such a figure—a figure whose positive forces of light, hope, goodness, truth, perfection and order—wield a certain symbolic authority over the liminal significance of the spectre? And how does the mysticism of music fortuitously provide an inroad for rethinking this problem?

The Body of Light: An Obstacle for Thought

What our difficult and threatening times need, more than anything else, is a revolution in cosmology: a complete revision of the way educated people have been trained to regard their cosmic environment. …What is now demanded is that the ear again be given precedence over the usurping eye: that tone, not diagrams or words, be acknowledged again as the truest reflection of reality, and hearing honoured as the sense through which we can best learn of its nature. …to penetrate the mysteries of music is to prepare for initiation into those fathomless mysteries of man and cosmos.

—Joscelyn Godwin

What would Godwin make of cinema’s own ‘cosmic’ companion—this visible, luminous figure of light—if, for his sacred studies, the mystery between music and cosmos returns to

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11 *The Very Eye of Night*, dir. Maya Deren (New York, 1958; Mystic Fire Videos, 2002), DVD.
“the ancient discipline of Musica Speculativa”, a practice which conceptualises “music as a
mirror (Latin: speculum) held up to reality”?16 What significance does the cinematic figure of
light also have for approaching “those fathomless mysteries between man and cosmos” that
Godwin believes to be better grasped through the vibrations of musical tome, rather than the
image regime of the eye? In a time where the utopian attributes of order, balance, goodness,
beauty, and perfect harmony have become the subject of disillusionment, indifference,
cynicism and scepticism, this particular figure might play a provocative role in Godwin’s
“revolution of cosmology”. With its proximity to the mysticism of music itself, this figure of
light, rendered visible in the films of Deren and McLaren, appears to speak less to an archaic
mythology, and more to a theosophical cosmology whose Hades has become Hell, and whose
Arcadia has become Heaven.17 Following Cobussen’s own method, I wonder how this
figure—with its unsettling convergence between monotheism, music and cinema—might
move between the reverent quietude of religiosity and a new kind of spiritual restlessness. In
this sense, I am interested in how this figure summons theology for the sake of rethinking its
boundaries, obstacles and interstices, and how we might reimagine the mode of utopian
desire itself through this process.

Let us begin again then with a concrete question: in what sense does this peculiar, luminous
figure in cinema resurrect the practices and rituals of mysticism? Or, to borrow Philip
Abbott’s question regarding the equivalence between a perfect society and a perfect body,
“Do everyday bodies “miraculously turn light and luminous” in utopias?”18 Already, in tune
with our grounding liminal framework, the boundary between ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ is becoming
more fluid, especially when placed within the cinematic space. With Deren and McLaren’s
luminary figures, we have the symbolic endorsement of those ancient, enduring ideals
peculiar to utopian desire: truth, beauty, goodness, perfection and freedom. As the real
presence of light, and suspended within the respective cinematic illusions of both celestial
night-sky and impenetrable abyss, this peculiar cinematic spirit rekindles the magic of a
figure long known to mysticism as, quite literally, the body of light.19 Central to both Eastern

16 Godwin, Cosmic Music, 9.
17 Meyer-Baer, “Theories of the Cosmos in Antiquity,” “The Hellenistic Period,” and “The Early Christian
Centuries,” in Music of the Spheres, 7–41.
18 Philip Abbott, “Should Utopians Have Perfect Bodies?,” Futures 42 (2010): 874,
doi:10.1016/j.futures.2010.05.001.
19 William Behun, “The Body of Light and the Body without Organs,” in “Spiritual Politics after Deleuze,”
and Western practices, and understood diversely as the subtle body, the astral body, the radiant body, the body of glory, “the celestial or luciform body, or organon of light, the augoeides or astroeides”, the body of light is the diaphanous, alchemic aspect of being which travels, oneirically and meditatively, beyond the limits of the physical self, becoming one with the divine cosmos itself.

As the astral entity of being, and bound to the order of God, this living conception of the aerial spirit, transcribed into the cinematic medium, presents some rather extraordinary problems for a singularly uncanny theory invested in the relation between music’s ‘secret’ anthropomorphic meanings and the cinematic human figure. Like the archaic definition of the undead spectre (psyché), this luminous presence of life is clearly distinguished from the eternal soul (psyché). Yet in keeping with medieval and Renaissance mystical theology, it is the intermediary spirit of the living (rather than the otherworldly spirit of afterlife) which flows between the body and the soul, and is able, in a kind of sleeping-awake state, to traverse those ordinarily invisible, inaudible planes of origin from this side of life. As its very name suggests, the body of light is gloriously hybridised, its ontological identity suspended in this mystical threshold between the human and the cosmic. Problematically, however, it simultaneously creates an impasse between essentialism and liminal thought. Resonating so clearly with the practices of mysticism as to be something of a totem figure, could the cinematic body of light—possessing the same transcendental aura that surrounds the mysterious musical encounter—speak to, or influence, an atopian (rather than utopian) sense of cinematic spirituality? Could it speak of a “no-place” rather than the idealised “good place” that remains central to mystical theology, thus communicating something other than the message of divine harmony, perfect order and transcendence?

In light of the enduring themes of desire and freedom that permeate the concept of spirituality itself, it seems appropriate, even necessary, to address such esoteric ambiguity through the elemental forces that ground the Christian mystic’s mode of existence. For arguably, as the

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22 Cobussen, Thresholds, 43–44.
visionary embodiment of the mystic’s subtle substance—as a figure somehow emancipated from a purely human identity—the cinematic body of light exudes precisely the aura that might summon such a desire for absolute freedom; here, for all to see, is the astral body’s journey toward an ecstatic, self-annihilating dissolution into the infinite. For theologian W.T. Stace, this desire characterises the human condition itself beyond cultures, epochs, histories, and most especially, beyond the modern, scientific turn toward a philosophy of naturalism.\textsuperscript{25} Stace describes the religious impulse as “the hunger for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable—or at least for that which is these things in the world of time”, the “hunger for the non-being which yet is”, the desire which “spring[s] from one and the same source, the universal religious consciousness of mankind, the universal impulsion of one and the same mystical vision.”\textsuperscript{26} In Stace’s account of this hunger, we encounter the universal belief that existence is, in essence, “a fetter”, that the human condition is plagued by the longing for the infinite, for a light it can never know or master, for the “ultimate ideal” which is, paradoxically, the “hopeless quest.”\textsuperscript{27} Once more, it is within the ecstatic experience of music that one encounters the feeling of a secret message, one which would ultimately locate an immense freedom beyond the finitude of the universe:

Religion seeks the light. But it is not a light which can be found at any place or time. It is not somewhere. It is the light which is nowhere. …In music, sometimes a man will feel that he comes to the edge of breaking out from the prison bars of existence, breaking out from the universe altogether. There is a sense that the goal is at hand, that the boundary wall of the universe is crumbling and will be breached at the next moment, when the soul will pass out free into the infinite. But the goal is not reached. For it is the unspeakable, the impossible, the inconceivable, the unattainable. There is only the sense of falling backward into time. The goal is only glimpsed, sensed, and then lost.\textsuperscript{28}

With its attention to the feeling of the soul’s release and return through this allusion to music’s virtual, kinaesthetic rise and fall, this passage gives substance to where the ecstatic musical experience might lead us, its articulation of freedom conjured through the sacred language of negation and its inseparable spatial metaphors. Within this, Stace’s universal, utopian “goal” is awakened. To go beyond the limits of the human, to become one with the

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 4, 5 and 15.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 4–5.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
infinite light, to know the mystery of God, and to do so in the time of life itself: this is (still) the province and office of music, however much it ceaselessly refuses to fulfil this promise.

Bringing music into relation with the \textit{cinematic} body of light—a figure which clearly articulates the \textit{vision} of such spiritual freedom—it would not be illogical, beneath the banner of theology, to interpret their \textit{co-presence} as the more complete manifestation of the transcendental destination described by Stace, thus placating, more completely, the ordeal of such longing. Wearing its mysticism on its sleeve, the cinematic body of light resonates with music’s own divine purpose for embodying the transcendental crossing that would distinguish the order of time from the order of eternity. To be luminous, aerial, vaporous, \textit{cosmic}, means to be free from not only the fetters of corporeal incarceration, but from the fetters of an explicitly \textit{human} identity. And this conception of alchemic transformation has its musical counterpart in the mystical ontology of a musical cosmos that centres upon the enchanting forces of \textit{tone}: in the ecstatic musical departure, one returns to the essence of life itself, the essence of movement, that is, \textit{vibration}. Like music, the cinematic body of light is this elemental, vibratory presence, an esoteric emblem given to the eye, rather than the ear. As such (and perhaps Godwin’s own “revolution of cosmology” might not concede this), it is entirely reasonable to suggest that the cinematic body of light naturally acts as another mystical conduit through which we might, for a time, imagine our own departure from the gravity and decay of our earth-boundedness toward more alpine elevations of pure consciousness.

It is here, in this synergy of vibration, that we begin to encounter new obstacles for thought, new obstructions for reimagining spiritual identity beyond Christian dogma. For it is precisely this cosmomorphic connection that remains potentially catastrophic for a \textit{liminal} mode of existence that would seek a spiritual \textit{nowhere} for cinema, rather than the stable, sacred and good \textit{somewhere} of divine radiance, and the questions that continue to cascade out from this unchartered complex are, in themselves, eccentric and unique. For instance, in pairing the body of light’s utopian vision with Cobussen’s atopian “nowhere” of music, does this luminous figure in fact \textit{undo} the unknown that would characterise the musical atopia? That is, if this luminous spirit seems so naturally to occupy thought’s \textit{vision} of the space “between heaven and earth” (a space so effortlessly visualised in the films of Deren and McLaren), does the cinematic body of light—incarnate in the age of the \textit{death} of God, yet nonetheless mediating the luminous presence of God—suddenly exhume the transcendental
divine for our relation to music? So replete with its own measure of divine radiance, this peculiar presence seems something of an existential agitator, re-opening the wound of music’s celestial, sacred origins, and drawing the relation itself back into a utopian, rather than a purely uncanny, sensibility.

Stace underscores the universal belief that human existence is a fetter, and the antithesis of spiritual freedom: if humanity seeks to go beyond itself, if humanity seeks to dissolve into all that is sublimely infinite and unbounded, I wonder if this cinematic body of light—this ineffable vision of the living spirit—viscerally symbolises this hollow pursuit, its alchemic transformation extending the definition of human being, life, existence, presence et al beyond the limits of the human and into the elements of nature itself, while simultaneously refusing a complete and absolute dissolution into the nothingness of religion’s great light through the template remains of its human form.

As a figure of mysticism, the cinematic body of light becomes undeniably problematic for theorising a liminal spirituality of cinema, one which recognises and enriches, rather than mutilates and overwhelms, the conceptual possibilities of Cobussen’s own musical atopia. As the unguarded resurgence of religion, I suggest that this bond between musical tone and the cinematic body of light is the reawakening of mystical theology’s principle belief in origination, and thus, an obstacle for thought that appears to undermine a non-religious, postmodern spirituality. That the cinematic body of light shares an ontological similitude to the life-force of the musical tone through its vibrational essence, may be, in itself, enough to condemn the relation to an essentialist impasse. Readily rescued by theological faith, and spun from the vibrational physics of the cosmos itself, here again is the possibility of a glorious eternity, the hope for an invisible, inaudible, and ineffable harmony expressed in the unifying, originating and complimentary life-forces of light and sound. Sufi teacher Hazrat Inayat Khan expresses the inherent dualism of this relation with absolute clarity, placing the primacy of sacred tone before the divinity of light:

What we call music in everyday language is only a miniature of that which is behind this all, and which has been the source and origin of this nature. …in the realm of music the wise can interpret the secret and nature…of the whole universe. …Those who have probed the depth of material science as far as modern science can reach, do not deny the fact that the origin of the whole creation is in movement, in other words: in vibration. It is this original state of
existence of life which is called in the ancient tradition sound, or the word. The first
manifestation of this sound is therefore audible, the next manifestation visible. In the forms of
expressions of life, life has expressed itself first as sound, next as light. This is supported by
the Bible where it is said that first was the word, and then came light. Again, one finds in a
Sura of the Qur’an: ‘God is the light of the heaven and earth’.
The nature of the creation is the doubling of one, and it is this doubling aspect which is the
cause of all duality in life. This doubling aspect represents one positive part, the other part
being negative; one expressive, the other responsive. Therefore, in the creation of this duality,
spirit and nature stand face to face. …The human body is a vehicle of the spirit, a finished
creation which experiences all the different aspects of creation.29

Here then, we cannot take Khan’s sense of “doubling” to reciprocate the liminality intrinsic
to the mode of the uncanny, archaic double; for Khan, essence and origination are the
foundations of absolute truth. For the uncanny, the notion of truth itself is undermined and
unstable. Thus, in pairing cinematic luminosity with musical sonority, this more elemental
sense of cosmic harmony could well be the most precise articulation of God’s numinous
universe yet to reveal itself in the sphere of the arts. In seeking a liminal pathway, we could
ask whether this unique aesthetic bond—a bond which exists concretely in the vibrational air,
the aether, and the atmosphere—might bear out, yet simultaneously obscure, a difference
between traditional and postmodern senses of spirituality, between the institutionalised
definition of the ineffable, unknown mystery of being within which the body of light belongs,
and the unnameable, a-theological sense which Cobussen carefully unfolds for music.30

Between Stace’s discourse on the nature of religious hope and belief, and Cobussen’s
divergent musical atopia, in now bringing the two discrete texts into a reciprocal circuit, we
might begin to work through this intense divergence-convergence in play, this time with ‘the
ineffable’ more clearly at the fore, and understood, more precisely, as a negative concept (in
Stace’s religious sense, as “the unspeakable, the impossible, the inconceivable, the
unattainable”, that which is beyond the order of speaking, thinking, knowing). We must begin
again with the problem of language so as to work through the difference between ‘The
Ineffable’ and ‘the ineffable,’ both of which may be approached through the language of
negation.

29 Khan, The Mysticism of Sound and Music, 16–18.
30 Cobussen, Thresholds, 48–50.
The Language of the Negative Divine

This is the vision…to endure ambiguity and to make a light shine through it…

— Shaarei Teshuva (Gates of Repentance)31

Let us try to bring the many ruminations and questions posed thus far into a more cohesive speculative framework. Within this more cosmomorphic rather than anthropomorphic spiritual bond, does the language of negation, of which both ‘the ineffable’ and ‘The Ineffable’ are a part, enclose the liminal potentiality of the cinematic body of light within the order of God? And as such, are we attempting to theorise what is essentially a theoretical impasse? For to introduce Cobussen’s unnameable utopian spirituality of music to the visionary space of cinema, and to attempt to grasp its nowhere-ness in the presence of the cinematic body of light, also means to borrow substantially from the traditional lexicon of mystical theology to articulate its presence. In particular, it means to borrow from the doctrine of silence inscribed within “the negative divine” which, in Stace’s account, is “an essential element in the developed religious consciousness of man”:

God is Non-Being, Nothing, Emptiness, the Void, the Abyss. Silence and darkness, used as privative terms importing the absence of sound, the absence of light, are also used as metaphors of His Non-Being. God is the great silence, the great darkness. …the negative divine makes its appearance explicitly in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. “God,” says Meister Eckhart “is…a Non-God, a Non-Spirit, a Non-Person, a Non-Form. …the still wilderness…the end of all things is the hidden darkness of the eternal Godhead.” …For [the numinous] is always, in all religions, ineffable, unutterable, inexpressible in any intellectual concepts. The conceptual intellect fails completely to grasp it. For Eckhart God is “the nameless Nothing.” Why nameless? Because, as every logician knows, any name, any word in any language, except a proper name, stands for a concept or a universal. Hence there can be no name where there is no concept. And God is ineffable and nameless because no concept can grasp Him.32

Through this sacred language of negation, Stace is once more fortuitously enclosing the ephemeral nature of both music and cinema within the certitude of dualism: by giving their

ineffability an original reason, the existence of light and tone is contingent upon those primordial conditions of the negative divine that enable their presence to be: darkness and silence. It is not illogical to say that music’s presence comes into being from the ‘emptiness’ of silence, just as the body of light comes into being from the void of darkness that would threaten to engulf it. In its theological transposition, it is the infinite ‘nothingness’ of this silence and darkness that would covet the form of eternity—“the end of all things”—against the temporal fragility and inevitable decay of tone and light. Each monumental title promised to the Ineffable Mystery of God—the absolute, the infinite, silence, darkness, stasis, eternity—secures the divine mystery of its elemental counterpart—the ‘something-ness’ of sound, light, motion, time, space—through this language of the negative divine. Yet Stace complicates this system of classification further:

> The logical principle to which this points is that a negative is always also a positive. A hole is a positive existence. If something is part of our experience, it is thereby proved to exist, whether we choose to call it positive or negative. We may say that darkness is the absence of light, but the darkness of night is just as much a positively experienced fact as is the light of the day.33

Within this interchange between presence and absence, where a thing can logically become its opposite, how would one intervene with such a perfectly balanced system to speak of a spirituality free from divine origination? In following Cobussen’s own ruminations closely, I contend that a spiritual relation between the musical tone and the cinematic body of light must somehow respond to these inscriptions without the accidental reformation of their faith. For as we shall continue to see, it is precisely this language of negation that grounds Cobussen’s more migratory mode of spiritual becoming, and it is through this language that something other than a belief in “an impregnable origin or end called God” is able to be articulated.34 At the close of the twentieth century, Willemien Otten shows us this convergence from the perspective of theology:

> Given especially Derrida’s critique of the Western onto-theological tradition…it is no surprise that he, and many others with him…connect the method of negative theology primarily with the absence of the divine, expressed most poignantly in the notion of the death of God. In the

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34 Cobussen, *Thresholds*, 78.
context of their debate, negative theology can lead quite naturally into a discussion on negative anthropology, a topic which has indeed begun to attract attention. After all, when God has died and the cosmos is stripped of all numinous qualities, how can humanity sidestep the confrontation with its own finitude? Outside postmodern circles, however, scholars with an interest in Christian mysticism have started to focus on the tradition of negative theology as well.\textsuperscript{35}

Certainly, Stace’s own treatise on eastern and western religions articulates this focus on traditional negative theology. Yet Otten’s disciplinary distinction between negative theology and deconstruction highlights a more complex paradox: two very different senses of this exactly similar language of negation ground these divergent schools of spiritual thought, both of which are very much alive in our own time. It is the simultaneity of these two senses, and their refusal to be compartmentalised, which I suggest permeates the spiritual mystery that flows between musical tone and the cinematic body of light. There is no easy delineation with which to deal with this relation: ‘The Ineffable’ is not exclusively the province of music, consigning ‘the ineffable’ to the cinematic body of light, or vice versa; both forms possess both senses. Together, the two mediums create this fluid strata of in/Ineffability which resists the mastery of the word/Word. Consequently, such simultaneity and cross-over provokes those questions that would keep the processes of philosophical thought and anthropological desire in their own circular limbo. Could this figure be something of a catalyst for the religious hunger Stace describes, something quite like the anthropomorphic essence of music embodied within film musicology’s argument for presence? Would it not be some small relief to allow McLaren’s cinematic void of darkness, with its manifestation of the negative divine, to rescue music from the death of God and all of its ensuing uncertainties: could the conjoined presence of a cosmic music and this cosmomorphic body of light—which is the vision of an ever-ascending spirit who traverses oneiric spaces between heaven and earth—realise, again, a dualistic conception of the cosmic whole, thus rescuing the idea of ‘spirituality’ itself from Cobussen’s radical indeterminacy? With the emptiness intrinsic to the negative divine realised through both an impenetrable darkness (from which comes the life of the cinematic body of light), and an infinite silence (from which comes the life of the musical tone), a language of faithful unknowing would seem to holistically bind the one to the other, satiating, to an incomparable degree, the longing to experience such freedom in the

time of life. That this nothingness is also a presence simply enhances the aura of mystery itself.

This, for me, is the tender trap of the language of negation: in searching for the nowhere of cinema’s own spiritual atopia, Stace’s religious hunger seems to prowl within its very processes. In not fully grasping where the negative divine ends and where a “contemporary spirituality” begins, perhaps the challenge for thinking this relation is in allowing this language of negation to remain the necessary crossing upon which to rethink the spiritual where of a cinema replete with music, and to do so with a mindfulness to the lost-ness of language itself. Let us finally return then to the questions that surround Cobussen’s atopia, with a clearer sense of their ever-amassing obstacles and potential impasses. In focusing on the mysticism of music, humanity and cosmos, we might eventually see where the cinematic body of light itself is hidden, how the ecstatic forces of religious hunger allow us to reroute the question of ontology, and how this reconfiguration ultimately opens out toward a new, more complex conception of the cinematic body of light’s spiritual place and purpose.

The Mystic as Ecstatic Wanderer in the Spiritual Nowhere

He who has come only in part to a freedom of reason cannot feel on earth otherwise than as a wanderer—though not as a traveller towards a final goal, for this does not exist. But he does want to observe, and keep his eyes open for everything that actually occurs in the world; there he must not attach his heart too firmly to any individual thing; there must be something wandering within him, which takes its joy in change and transitoriness.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

How is Cobussen’s nowhere-ness different from the nothingness and namelessness of mysticism’s negative divine? How does Cobussen arrive at his musical atopia that cannot be thought or spoken, but is spoken, nonetheless, through a language which also articulates the Being of God? What kind of message is he seeking in retelling the journey of the mystic, whose negative divine is echoed in the ‘new’ spiritual discourse? While Cobussen is seeking

36 Stace, Time and Eternity, 17–18.
37 Cobussen, Thresholds, 78.
38 Nietzsche, aphorism 638, in Human, All Too Human, 266.
a message, he is also, like Hermes, something of a messenger himself, retracing the paths of
the mystics, but also those of ‘nomads’ such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Derrida,
Foucault, and Deleuze, each of whom wander through the mysteries of the artwork in search
of new thoughts and new possibilities for existence beyond language. With such guides, he
would search for a spirituality of music free from the regimes of religion within the very
spaces that such regimes are inscribed. In the orders of eastern and western mysticism he
finds intermediary aspects and entities which occupy the space between those poles
historically reserved for Platonic-Christian thought: found within traditional binary
oppositions that would ordinarily stabilise the cosmological question of the spiritual where,
and in response to the death of God, Cobussen’s ‘in-betweens’ pose a series of interventions
that entirely reconfigure the relation between music, identity and utopian desire.

Through the speculative work of Godwin especially, Cobussen finds the oneiric
consciousness of the mystic who, in a kind of sleeping awake, travels beyond his body to the
luminous astral world, and, going higher still, comes to the angelic realm of Devachan (“deva
means ‘angel’ or ‘demigod’ in Sanskrit”), the primordial world of magical tones, “Man’s
original home”. He writes of the Romantic composer who is able to summon and translate
this divine, radiant plane “of sublimest spirituality” for our own mortal, earthly senses, and
who—like the mystic, the alchemist, the angel, Hermes himself—“acts as some kind of
messenger or intermediary between these two worlds” of heaven and earth. He also finds
Marsilio Ficino’s luminous spiritus, the “corporeal vapour” which flows between (but again,
is both and neither) soul and body, the subtle substance through which the mystic practices
flights of transfiguration and empowerment. As Godwin writes, this luminous substance is,
for Ficino’s medicinal alchemy of the Renaissance, the primary conduit for the apothecary
benefits of music: if music is uniquely able to improve the melancholy being of the self, it is
because both music and spiritus are of the air and the aether, “because the medium of sound,
air, is the most similar to [the spiritus] in substance.”

40 Cobussen, Thresholds, 42–43, 65–73.
41 Ibid., 41—51.
42 Ibid., 43–44.
43 Ibid., 42.
44 Godwin, Harmonies of Heaven and Earth, 25.
45 Ibid.
Cobussen perceives that such intermediary sites, inscribed within the doctrines of traditional mysticism, can in fact be the catalyst for an intervention of thought, if we can first perceive the nascent, creative possibilities available within this very concept of the intermediary: in using these mystical thresholds to grasp that the spirituality of music exists somewhere between their polarities, we are closer to thinking the in-between as a space that evokes both a “somewhere” and a “nowhere” at one and the same time. For Cobussen, this “space between heaven and earth” is the beginning for thinking the emptiness of atopia, the non-space of music’s spirituality which, as I hope to show, is precisely what is endangered in the presence of both the cinematic body of light and the void of nothingness that surrounds it.

Ultimately, in this question of where the spiritual province of music exists, a question discovered through mysticism’s own sacred language of space, Cobussen admits that “the paradoxical, disenchancing answer is that it has no place. It seems that the where-question can be answered only if we radically give up thinking in fixed locations or nameable places. …To conceive of this atopia can be a real stumbling block.”46 This is the obstacle that the spiritual atopia of music poses for thought, and to grasp even a glimmer of its nowhere-ness requires a relinquishment from the Western contagion for categories, names, definitions, identities, for “[i]ts inbetweenness seems to mean ‘both…and’ and ‘neither…nor.’”47 Thus the slippery enigma of this atopia re-opens the wound of logos—of reasoned thinking, speaking, writing and knowing—the wound which the utopian desire for immortal truth seeks to anaesthetize. As Cobussen writes, “To have no place (also) means to be unnameable. It (also) means to have no place within the categorical and classification systems of Western thinking.”48

Ironically however, if we are attempting to distinguish between two different kinds of spirituality (both of which are present within our two co-present mediums) through the processes of thinking, speaking and writing, we must reconcile ourselves with one of the more difficult crossings between the dialogues of Stace and Cobussen. The concept of the threshold—as the space of the in-between—is the catalyst and conduit for Cobussen’s thought experiments, its liminal ‘form’ and (non)definition necessarily paradoxical and indeterminate. Problematically, as Stace’s treatise proves, the basic notion of paradox is not enough to move our immediate enquiry beyond the boundaries of theology’s own discourse.

46 Cobussen, Thresholds, 47–48.
47 Ibid., 47.
48 Ibid., 48.
Earlier we saw that the unnameable cannot be cleanly severed from its monotheistic history, the familiarity, consolation and belonging innate to utopian desire’s good place readily overshadowing the displacement and dispossession of the atopian no place. Here, in common with Cobussen’s radically “unnameable” tradition, Stace will also define the nature and pursuit of religious hope as being intrinsically paradoxical, his reverence for Whitehead’s treatise clearly invoking the significance of contradiction:

“Religion,” says Whitehead, “is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet alludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.” …These words…are the original sources of religion. To the “something” of which they speak are attributed opposite characters which barely avoid …the clash of flat contradiction. Each clause is a balance of such contradicting predicates. The meaning cannot be less than that paradox and contradiction are of the very essence of that “something” itself. …Since God is Nothing, He is therefore not this kind of being nor that kind of being. He is neither this, nor that.49

To the accumulating convergences between an old spirituality and a new, of which anthropomorphic thought and the language of the negative divine already subsist, we must also add this principle of paradox. And again we must ask; what is it that distinguishes Cobussen’s thresholds, replete with the presence of an unnameable nowhere, from the paradoxical something-ness and Nothingness of God?50 What does it mean to speak of the spirituality of music in a ‘new’ sense, and of its ineffability, if the concept of spirituality itself, so endowed as the ineffable/Ineffable, is haunted by the memory of a God made in the image of man, if (as in the harmony of the spheres) the cosmos itself is ever haunted by the divine feeling that music inspires, if music and spirituality are both haunted by a dialogue that has long upheld the Platonic-Christian conception of a humanised universe whose existence is contingent upon the sonorous tone of the word of God who ‘let there be light’?

50 Østrem, “Music and the Ineffable,” 287.
Cobussen does not speak explicitly of anthropomorphism as it relates to mysticism’s cosmic music. Nonetheless, it quietly underscores his reconciliation to a certain inevitability, or perhaps necessity, for ‘groping’ through the problem that anthropocentric thought creates and sustains for language. Seeking a discourse that reroutes the stable consolations of religion, Cobussen argues for the continued presence of language, rather than its absence, and for challenging the gauntlet that the spiritual significance of music, as ineffable, throws down for thought:

Although spirituality may involve a sense of the ineffable and the unnameable, and although it lacks apt categories, these are not arguments relieving us from the task of bringing it up. …poststructuralists and philosophers of language have pointed out the paradox: only through language, only through categorical frameworks will we ever be able to catch a glimpse of this realm outside or beyond language and its accompanying institutions. To reach the unthinkable through thinking, the unspeakable through speech, the space-between through classifications, the ineffability of spirituality and music through language—this possible impossibility, this paradoxical task, is awaiting us.\(^{51}\)

If this language of negation—which includes the ineffable, the unthinkable, the inexpressible, the unknowable, the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the intangible, the ungraspable—is thought’s medium for articulating the aura of mystery intrinsic to both traditional theology and Cobussen’s postmodern spirituality, how else might we grasp a difference, particularly if Stace’s traditional mysticism also claims the rights to paradox? Stace perceives the “final Mystery” as simultaneously a presence and an absence, positive and negative, against the scepticism of pure rationality:

\[T]he religious soul must leave behind all things and beings, including itself. From being it must pass into Nothing. But in this nothing it must still be. …And God, who is the only food which will appease [religious] hunger, is this Being which is Non-Being. Is this a contradiction? Yes. But men have always found that, in their search for the Ultimate, contradiction and paradox lie all around them. …The rationalizing intellect…will attempt to explain away the final Mystery, to logicize it, to reduce it to the categories of “this” and “that.” …all attempts to make religion a purely rational, logical, thing are not only shallow

\(^{51}\) Cobussen, *Thresholds*, 67.
but would, if they could succeed, destroy religion. Either God is a Mystery or He is nothing at all.52

Stace’s project is thus to defend a conception of the nature of religion that he feels has been over-simplified in the wake of scientific rationalism. Thus, the Ineffable aura of Mystery—present beneath the surface of things, fraught with paradox as it compels religious hunger—must necessarily remain on high within the firmaments of faith as a form of knowledge. Here, one must be careful not to be drawn into a discussion that will only restore the simplistic divide between scientific evolution and creationist belief, for ultimately, there is an entirely different kind of thought available to us, if we can move beyond this system of either/or, and grasp the more useful gestures within the work of the mystic. As Stace writes, intrinsic to mystical practice is the necessary act of a movement, of a journey or passage—the ordaining of a leaving behind, even of the self—and this is precisely where we might begin to see a radical difference in Cobussen’s work, and where we might begin to grasp a new relation between spiritual identity, desire and freedom, one that is beyond the orders that enclose Stace’s religious hunger, but which does not evacuate or annihilate the significance of their memory and metamorphoses. Like Stace, Cobussen will continue to challenge a western tendency that violates the unknown-ness of being, yet his work, as one of radical, creative experimentation, will focus on the impossibility of a secure province for faith and the absence of eternal stasis: his atopia marks the loss of an infinite space that (for Christianity) encompasses the end of all things, beyond the time of life, and within the order of God.

In this sense, Cobussen is less interested in an ontology of spirituality than its location and purpose: if we are open to the idea that ‘the spiritual,’ like music, is not contingent upon a stable definition of God—even one that accounts for the aura of mystery intrinsic to the ineffable—we must be ready to release those regimes of thought that would anchor the spirituality of music to thinkable, inhabitable spaces such as ‘Heaven.’ Again, Cobussen rethinks this idea through the practice of the mystic, and through the ritual of pilgrimage, which, for a new spirituality, no longer possesses a sense of purposeful direction, but the traces of decenteredness, disquietude. Becoming nomadic, the mystic thus embarks upon a journey that is marked by itinerant, aimless dispossession rather than goal-oriented travelling:

52 Stace, Time and Eternity, 8.
…spirituality seems to open a space that can never be occupied because it is, ‘by definition,’ ec-static, not static, un-stable, enduringly moving. …The mystic is a wanderer, a nomad. Spirituality means to leave places, infinitely exploring (inter)territories, always dynamic, always on the move. Therefore, spirituality has to be found between places, in the ‘in-between.’ Like the nomad. Like a nomad. … “The life of a nomad is the intermezzo” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 380). Following Deleuze and Guattari, spirituality’s nomadism might be clearly distinguished from religion’s desire and ability to sedentarize, to establish a solid and stable centre. …What is the difference between this ‘traditional mysticism’ of the Enlightenment and contemporary spirituality? … where seekers like Labadie are still drawn to an impregnable origin or end called God, the current traveller is unable to ground himself in such a belief any longer. What remains is an empty place. He no longer rests upon a foundation or moves toward a goal. His experience maintains only the form and not the content of that bygone mysticism.53

Thus, in serendipitous response to the paradox in Stace’s theology, if there is a clear distinction amidst so much terminological cross-over, it is within this idea of the “goal” of the traditional mystic, who—through the creation or liberation of the spiritus, through alchemic practices such as astral flight,54 through the use of music—‘knows’ that a final, ecstatic departure from the body of sorrow is possible. No longer the site of utopia, but still fanned by utopian desire, the empty space of atopia—as a nowhere and a nothingness vastly removed from God’s traditional negative space—is where the stillness of belief used to be. Now, the journey of spirituality still covets the excess, crisis, and pathos of pursuing the unknown mystery, but the seeker is refused the desired euphoric resolution: following Michel de Certeau, Cobussen perceives that what still remains in contemporary culture is “the movement of perpetual departure”,55 though now it can no longer be “sedentarized”, stilled or centred with the knowledge of some final resting place above and beyond the phenomenological world. We could be even more precise with this, to suggest that such a departure can no longer still or centre Stace’s religious hunger, for it is still bound to this desire, if we perceive desire itself as a force of flux and turmoil—as the itinerant wanderer within us—in the time of life. Where one kind of spirituality claims a paradox that will ultimately resolve into certitude, the other’s will remain aporetic, and refuse the security of

53 Cobussen, Thresholds, 77–78.
55 Cobussen, Thresholds, 78.
such resolution. One resolves its evocations of incertitude, the other realises that such resolution, answering to the muse of imaginary belief, has become nonsensical, absurd.

There are still other sacred crossings, inseparable to this, that Cobussen will forage through to rethink the spiritual where. Once more, Cobussen will echo theology for the purpose of rerouting its orientation, this time rethinking the ancient connection between the unknown (agnōstos) and the mystical rite of ecstasy (ekstasis).56 In his discussion on Georges Bataille, Cobussen understands the further difference between the traditional mystic and a spiritual nomad such as Bataille as turning on the utilitarian purpose of ecstatic practice. For the mystic, Cobussen writes, “ecstasy should finally lead to God”, it is “tied to a purpose”:

[The mystic’s] not-knowing must eventually simmer down in a serene and eternal knowing. Their not-knowing is rather a not-yet-knowing. Mystics are not permanently open to undecidability, as they believe in a higher sense. In Bataille’s philosophy, ecstasy is meaningless and nowhere can one find a refuge.57

Through precisely this collision between the purposeful rite of ecstasy and the restlessness of nomadic wandering, and through this distinction regarding time itself, Cobussen would reconfigure music’s role to reflect a very different sense of freedom that comes with such ecstatic wandering. Now, music is no longer the vehicle that would elevate the spiritus into this state of “serene and eternal knowing”, its province and office clearly deviating from a traditionally stable convergence between the presence of the ineffable, the divine mystery of God, and the nature of the Cosmos.58 Bereft of belief, of God, of the goal, we must suppose that the spiritus—the conduit for desire itself—also wanders aimlessly without end as dispossessed outcast, the strangeness of its newfound freedom causing it to move, like the nomad, “to and fro, hither and thither, with neither fixed course nor certain end. Such wandering is erring—erring in which one not only roams, roves, and rambles, but also strays, deviates, and errs.”59

Spirituality, music, the spiritus, the ecstatic mystic, the wanderer, the nomad…all now the unlikely inhabitants of a spiritual no-man’s-land, decentred from the space between heaven

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56 Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, see agnōstos 6.
57 Cobussen, Thresholds, 78–79 n6.
58 Stace, Time and Eternity, 32–40.
59 Cobussen, Thresholds, 73.
and earth, now inhabiting this unthinkable, empty place, the space which no longer is, but then again, is nonetheless still something, in that it carries the burden of the ineffable/Ineffable.

What—or rather where—would the spiritus become in Cobussen’s atopia, and through which processes might we then create a new role for the cinematic body of light? Let us prepare a slow pathway back to this body through its primary sensory perception of the visible, and the utopian component of hope that is symbolically bound to this vision.

**A Transcendental Relapse: The Imaginary Cosmological Cartography**

What makes hope such an intense pleasure is the fact that the future, which we dispose of to our liking, appears to us at the same time under a multitude of forms, equally attractive and equally possible. Even if the most coveted of these becomes realized, it will be necessary to give up the others and we will have lost a great deal. The idea of the future, pregnant with an infinity of possibilities, is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we find more charm in hope than in possession, in dreams than in reality.

—Henri Bergson

If the mystic has ever made use of both music and the body of light for the attainment of ecstasy, serenity and truth, what purpose could the spiritus now serve in relation to music? Nowhere, yet still somehow between and beyond things that may or may not exist, it would seem quite literally lost in the aether, searching amidst a vast atmospheric, vaporous, luminous, vibratory, aerial and etherical plane of energy, displaced in the no-man’s-land that unsettles and destabilizes the very binary system it derives from, the system which dictates the traditional ‘space’ of spirituality.

Following Cobussen, we could say that, as for music and spirituality, so too for the itinerant spiritus, this atopia cannot be a safe “third place” that replaces the secure position of the oppositions surrounding it; it is still haunted by the co-presence of a body and a soul, haunted by the concept of God, so much so, that a postmodern, deconstructive thinking of spirituality beyond fixed (cosmological) spatial terms is ever in danger of what we might tentatively call an involuntary transcendental relapse: following Bataille’s aspiration to leave the unknown-

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ness of the spiritual unnamed, Cobussen writes, “[t]he conversion from a non-place into a topos and the absorption of the in-between into well-defined categories are processes constantly lurking.” How might such a relapse transpire, even before we re-introduce the cinematic body of light back into this mire of interpolating values, beliefs, and ideals? What is it that lurks or remains within us? Or rather, what else lurks within us, other than and in addition to the uncanny processes of anthropomorphic thought that readily come to rescue thought from incertitude? How might the divine traces of a cosmomorphic music re-assert what Bataille calls “the enclosure of the unknown in some form of knowledge once again”?

Tentatively, ironically, could we suggest that it is some inner vision of music’s spirituality that seeks to settle and secure rational thought? Toward the enduring question of music’s transcendence of signification, does this notion of a space between heaven and earth not, paradoxically, wake up the mind’s (religious and logocentric) eye, and call upon a vast gallery of inner cosmological images which would cannily re-determine the spiritual where? Does the divine feeling in music involuntarily summon what we might call the mirage of a mystical cartography, an imaginary cosmological map, one which may only designate the where of heaven and earth through the necessary presence of the air and the aether that separates them?

Extending the significance of Cobussen’s atopia and spiritus then, could we suppose that these two concepts are obstacles for thought precisely because they would, together, disturb and derail thought’s inseparable vision or image of the spiritual where: if this space between body and soul, and between heaven and earth, is “the white spot on the map of language, the hole of language,” surely it is so because no image comes to rescue thought from the “blank interval” that stands in place of our map, from this “non-localizable place” which “haunts binary thinking.” Without this map, the where of spirituality seems to evaporate upon the (non)planes of an aether that, like music, cannot be seen or spoken, cannot be named, and yet unlike music, cannot be humanised. Through this more elemental, atmospheric, luminous sense that would rupture even the anthropomorphic tendencies that compel both religious desire and the uncanny processes of thought, the unsayable secret of music’s meaning now thrives amidst the spatial metaphors of this divine cosmos, rather than within the interior spaces of the sentient human.

61 Cobussen, Thresholds, 49.
62 Cobussen, Thresholds, 49.
63 Ibid., 46–48.
As suggested earlier, Cobussen’s speculations seem only remotely related to the problem of anthropomorphic thought that the very question of a mystical cosmos—a cosmos created by a God whose image is man, a divine cosmos which man longs to feel utterly at one with—seems to inevitably re-introduce. While, as Otten writes, “the source of all problems surrounding theological language [is] the notion of humanity as the image of God”, its inverse, that God is (anthropomorphically) created in the image of man, would seem equally entrenched within the processes of cosmomorphism. Placing music within this mystical framework, this image of the divine human is also, for our imagination, an image of the spiritus, and of the body of light, whose faith has lost its moorings, and whose estranged freedom has yet to become joyous.

Through the following summations of Cobussen’s work, I would seek this more joyous purpose for contemplating the spirituality of the cinematic body of light, for its wandering, and for its own peculiar leaving behind of a self that is no longer certain. If the cinematic body of light is now, in some sense, also free of theological certainty, could its movements now appear to embody those of perpetual departure, endless unsettlement and dispossession, yet in so doing, echo the more empowering sentiments of Nietzsche’s earlier aphorism:

He who has come only in part to a freedom of reason cannot feel on earth otherwise than as a wanderer—though not as a traveller towards a final goal, for this does not exist. …there must be something wandering within him, which takes its joy in change and transitoriness.66

**Conclusion: A Totemic Purpose for the Body of Light**

Let us end where we began, with Cobussen describing his musical atopia as “a non-place”…a “refuge…where Western thought breaks down…the non-space of spirituality, spirituality as an encounter with the inhuman…a radical otherness [which] recognizes and affirms the empty space, left behind after ‘the death of God’.”67

In attempting to draw out a spiritually-complex connection between the cinematic body of light and Cobussen’s approach to the spiritual where of music—and in recognising the

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65 Nietzsche, aphorism 573, in *The Will to Power*, 308.
66 Nietzsche, aphorism 638, in *Human, All Too Human*, 266.
inevitable and ironic role that mysticism must play through its vibrational bond between light and sound—I have tried to extend these conceptual boundaries beyond the convergence of the human and the divine, and beyond a purely archaic spirit-reality of the dead and the undead that characterises Gorky’s cinematic kingdom of shadows. Following Cobussen, I have sought to contextualise this bond through this alternative cosmological threshold which remains, for religious consciousness, above the earth rather than below, resurrecting a monotheistic, rather than a polytheistic, system of thought. If there is a figure that would rival the imaginary existence of the archaic mortal-divine because of its singular allusion to the living spirit of mystical practice, I think it must be this cinematic body of light. With its tripartite convergence of the human, the divine and the elemental (luminous) cosmic, this is the spirit bound to truth, beauty, perfection and goodness, all of which are symbolically rendered through this presence of light, a presence that would simultaneously summon the divine light intrinsic to mysticism’s ecstatic music practice. In the presence of music, the request this body makes for thought is a request to go, as Cobussen does, further into theology rather than before or beyond it, to see if there is something to be salvaged, something buried within or beneath its thresholds, something already performing a kind of metamorphosis in its migration into this other, more marginalised understanding of spirituality.

The films of Deren and McLaren present a cinematic body of light. We might think of this figure as the properly modern legacy of the Renaissance spiritus which flows between the soul and the living body, and which inhabits the space between heaven and earth. In a spiritual sense, this body becomes an obstacle for thought, re-introducing a somewhere to ironically re-centre and re-stabilise Cobussen’s atopian nowhere, and for this reason also, we cannot evade religion: the symbol of divine radiance shines forth from the darkness surrounding it, the language of the negative divine naturally encompassing and defining this mystical liminal zone that simultaneously includes, however impossibly or paradoxically, the nomadic liminal space of Cobussen’s wandering mystic.

In light of this strange irony, perhaps we could say that The Ineffable (of God) and the ineffable (of non-religious unknowing) now mark the crossing between an old spirituality and a new; the one that yearns and longs for the infinite bliss of eternity, and the other that realises that not only is such utopian idealism untenable in a dystopian world of adversary, suffering, madness, and nihilistic decay, but also that this absolute unknowing, within which
nothing is secure, requires the unadorned relinquishment of names such as God, Eternity and Heaven. Correspondingly, the cosmic threshold between the tone of music and the cinematic body of light also marks the crossing between these two distinct modes of spirituality, and between two variations of a particular presence that cannot be easily or logically delineated. If the cinematic body of light represents an ideal of freedom, it would clearly represent both kinds: the one whose definition entails the goal of eternity through the practice of ecstasy and rapture, and the other which remains ill-defined, its impossible nowhere ironically sustaining the fatigue of thought and language.

As such, Cobussen’s complex work prepares the ground for our own thought experiment, providing a plurality of obstacles that would reveal the difficulties afoot in theorising a clear, uncomplicated path toward this figure’s spiritual bond with music. In recognising these obstacles, could there be some new purpose for this arguably controversial figure, one which would recognise the moral implications of such a convergence? Could we approach the problem from a rather different perspective again, focusing more on the dynamic action or impetus that generates and impels Cobussen’s own processes? For when placed in the presence of the cinematic body of light, we see that it is not only what and where this musical-spiritual atopia is and is not that is significant, but also what it does for thought, and what it becomes for us. I suggest that this relation between the cinematic body of light and the musical atopia becomes a locus of change which marks the very moment upon which the meaning of spirituality itself changes.

In this continual passage between the two kinds of spirituality, where the old is ever within the new, and where the ecstasy of belief collapses into the “ec-static” forces of incertitude, the two kinds of spirituality surge across the strata of the two mediums. Within this, could we wonder whether there is a more memorial purpose at work for this bond, one which would allow us to grasp its role as a kind of totem or guardian for the transition from one mode of spirituality to another? Let us finish then, by gathering a sense of this purpose through the insights and questions that the impetus of Cobussen’s own meditations afford.

Cobussen’s musical atopia unleashes an ungovernable incertitude, one that would see uncanny processes (those which cannot be contained by the order of religion) ever encroaching on a territory which once clearly belonged to The Ineffable. Thus by its inseparable association, the residue of theology already haunts the desire to speak of the
spiritual in music. Cobussen’s project is not to defame those belief systems that are predicated on principles of conformity, for, as he argues, even a ‘new’ kind of spirituality—such as the postmodern category of “New Spiritual Music”—is founded on a sense of belonging, of naming, and of boundary-making.68 Instead, Cobussen allows the intermediary elements within mysticism—the *spiritus*, the space between heaven and earth—to perform their own kind of poetic magic or alchemy, to become, through the language of negation, less the mark of theological order and stasis, and more the revelation of a no-man’s-land, a disordered, spiritual wasteland within which one becomes a wandering nomad. Left to drift in the wake of the death of God, the spiritual in music is still a feeling that compels the imagination, but one that is now indeterminately nameless, belonging nowhere, as it learns to reconcile itself with the absence, rather than the presence, of the divine, and to live into its own creative possibilities. And although this nomadic sense of spirituality still requires the legacy which the death of God leaves behind (the *language* of sacred belief becoming, by strange necessity, the medium through which to move music from transcendental truth to spiritual ambivalence), it is re-introduced for the purpose of challenging thought’s love for a language that turns on the axis of space, a concept which persists in the effort to speak the meaningfulness of both cinema and music. Tracing the archive that follows Nietzsche, Cobussen can only emancipate the spirituality of music from the centred-ness and stability of mysticism’s cosmic structure—the stations of heaven and earth—by redeeming such aporias as the unthinkable and nowhere-ness, and offering a sense that reroutes and derails the *spiritual where* of traditional theology.

Placed within the *visual space* of cinema, Cobussen’s musical atopia remains vulnerable to the enclosure of thought’s desire for stable *spatial* categories, significantly those of heaven and earth. Yet to counter this, *time itself* becomes the ground of possibility for thinking this fluctuating convergence between space and non-space, utopia and atopia. Between a time of faith and a time of disillusionment, a time of rapture and a time of rupture, a time of the mystic’s goal, and a time of the wanderer’s restlessness, the cinematic body of light literally *illuminates* the simultaneity of two supposedly discrete *beliefs about time itself*, collapsing the boundary between two modes of spirituality.

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With all of these crossings we have now traversed, is it possible to reimagine the cinematic body of light, so immersed in its musical counterpart, as the crossing for change because it carries its former belief system within it; not as a figure who would endanger us to the transcendental relapse with its symbolic goodness, beauty, truth and perfection, but as a figure who would summon us to bear witness to our own longing for a belief in perfection, our own desire for the preservation of utopian desire itself? In another way, if the cinematic body of light revives the astral spirit of mystical theology, while redeeming a musical atopia that is, paradoxically, shaped through the same language, perhaps it is possible—in light of the death of God, in light of what Tarkovsky calls the spiritual impotence of modern man\textsuperscript{69}— to perceive this body as not only the totemic guardian of utopian desire (not so much the token remainder of God, but of Stace’s hunger to create and believe in a truth that ‘God’ affords), but, more complexly, as Cobussen’s own mystic who, still harbouring the time of his old self, creates a new movement of faith out of this utopian-atopian abyss. In the continuous burial and exhumation of the musical divine, in the ceaseless closure and reopening of utopian desire, this peculiar doubling is ultimately what makes the cinematic body of light unique as a symbol of modal plurality: it is utopian, ineffable and uncanny at one and the same time, and in this sense, reimagines the extent to which art and modes of spirituality commune.

\textsuperscript{69} Tarkovsky, \textit{Sculpting in Time}, 42.
Chapter Four: Burlesquing the Spirit in the Cinema of the Absurd(s)

The absurd is what is dissonant or is not heard (cf. Lat. *surdus*)...a discord or disagreement with the understanding, or reason, or with meaning, including the meaning of life. …the absurd designates an actual manifestation of the absence of reason. The absurd, as a sensation of the absence of meaning, is also something experienced … In a specific, positive way, the three components of the absurd—logical, linguistic, and existential—are at work in the French word *esprit*; “nonsense” refers to a specific form of humour related in English to “wit” and in German to Witz (see NONSENSE, WITTICISM).

—*The Dictionary of Untranslatables*¹

In what sense might we reimagine the cinema books of Gilles Deleuze as a meditation on spiritual, existentialist thought? How might Deleuze’s Kierkegaardian borrowings lead us toward the fuller creative conceptualisation of a cinema of the absurd through his cinema of faith in the body of time and feeling? In bringing Deleuze’s cinema of faith into relation with the affective, theatrical forces of a gestural, jesting cinema of the body, are we able to rethink the ideal attitude of the spiritual life beyond the enduring cliche of the ascetic, serious (hu)man of faith? In grasping the absurd through its basic etymological paradox—the intertwined seriousness and nonsense of existence—how might Kierkegaard’s ‘theatre of repetition’—the serious doctrine of existential despair and faith which performs beneath the rhetorical mask of irony and humour—perform as another voice in Deleuze’s ensemble of orators of the body?

‘Give me a body then’: Kierkegaardian Borrowings and the Spirit of Immanence

The absurd, or acting by virtue of the absurd, is then to act in faith, with confidence in God.

——Søren Kierkegaard²

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To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: ‘something possible, otherwise I will suffocate’. It is this belief that makes the unthought the specific power of thought, through the absurd, by virtue of the absurd.

—Gilles Deleuze

“ ‘Give me a body then’: this is the formula of philosophical reversal.”  

This is how Deleuze begins Chapter 8 “Cinema, body and brain, thought” in Cinema 2. More-often, Deleuze’s summons for a body is directly attributable to a very particular ensemble—Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Artaud: these are Deleuze’s body-thinkers, his orators of the body—believers in the infinite possibilities of the body—who prepare a very particular body for thought, one we might call the body of immanence. Yet what is meant by ‘a body’, and how might it relate to the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard, whose anchoring refrain in Fear and Trembling, is this ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd’? For what purpose would Deleuze borrow this other Kierkegaardian fragment ‘something possible, otherwise I will suffocate’?  

And how might these, and other fragments such as “the spirit of sacrifice”, the “powerlessness” of thought, and an “ethics or faith that makes fools laugh” also be attributable to what Deleuze will elsewhere call Kierkegaard’s “theatre of humour and of faith”? How might Kierkegaard, the Christian existentialist of immanence, also be thought as one such orator of the body within the cinema books?

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3 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 170.
4 Ibid., 189.
7 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 8–11.
Deleuze’s Orators of the Body: Infinite Bodies and Spiritual Landmines

What is certain is that believing is no longer believing in another world, or in a transformed world. It is only, it is simply believing in the body. …Artaud said the same thing, believe in the flesh…Our belief can have no object but ‘the flesh’, we need very special reasons to make us believe in the body (‘the Angels do not know, for all true knowledge is obscure…’) We must believe in the body…which bears witness to life, in this world as it is.

—Gilles Deleuze

“ ‘Give me a body then’ is first to mount the camera” on a body.⁹…a body of tiredness and waiting, of stasis and paralysis, of action and crisis, of shock and affection, of crystals and planes, of dead forces and life forces, of burlesque and banality, of gesture, posture and attitude, of the serious and the sublime, of the grotesque and the uncanny, of madness and melodrama, of psychics and seers, of dances and dreams, of liquid perception and gaseous perception…a body whose theatrical grounding of ‘gesting’ and jesting would, beyond the mediation of words, before things are named, communicate its mode of existence affectively, authentically, luminously… a body of love and hate, good and evil, falsity and truth…a body which opens the kinaesthetic circuit of a reciprocity of feeling, and which calls up and casts out the dilutions of impotence, anaesthesia and catatonia that come to claim the absurdity of the modern world…¹⁰…a body of energies, vibrations, rhythms, forces, passions, tensions, intensities and breakages, rather than a body whose significance is solely contingent upon whether it is, or is not, a body of God, a body that God depends upon for order…a body of Vertov, Chaplin, Dreyer, Dulac, Buñuel, Welles, Brecht, Bresson, Eisenstein, Rossellini, Pasolini, Godard, Resnais, Tarkovsky…a body of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Artaud…a body of Kierkegaard…all the infinite bodies that cinema gives to thought…this is a Deleuzian cinema of the body, of the spirit, of modes of existence, of thought and the unthought…a cinematic restoration of faith in the body of time and feeling…a cinema of the absurd…

With so many bodies of movement and time, how might we begin to grasp Deleuze’s credo—“We must believe in the body”—as the spiritual ground of the cinema books? And what are the spiritual landmines that irrupt as we encounter the infinite variations of this body?

⁸ Deleuze, Cinema 2, 172–73.
⁹ Ibid., 189.
¹⁰ For gesting body see Deleuze, Cinema 2, 192–203; for the burlesque body see Cinema 1, 169–77.
Following Spinoza, it is what a body can do—or perhaps can no longer do—that matters for Deleuze, and what it can teach us about ourselves; no longer a body strung-up between time and eternity, as with Bazin, but a messenger-body harbouring lessons of time… In Rossellini’s neo-realism, Deleuze sees the everyday, banal body as the reservoir of time’s tattoos, as a living mausoleum to the hopeless situation it endures, by virtue of gestures and attitudes, by virtue of the absurd:

‘Give me a body then’ is first to mount the camera on an everyday body. The body is never in the present, it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting. Tiredness and waiting, even despair are attitudes of the body. …This is a time-image, the series of time. The daily attitude is what puts the before and after into the body, time into the body, the body as a revealer of the deadline.

If this bears out the qualitative feeling of Bergsonian duration, it also summons the essence of a figure that Kierkegaard will call “despairing man”, for whom death will not come, not even when we long for death’s reprieve. Already, this is a cinema of the absurd, restoring us to time’s relation to the horror of an absurd existence, and rerouting the very meaning of eternity through these messages engraved upon the body. Is this not already profoundly ironic, if, for an atheistic sensibility, the notion of eternity is, in itself, an impossible concept? Is time itself the spiritual landmine that Deleuze hides within his bodies?

Artaud… points to ‘real psychic situations between which trapped thought looks for a subtle way out’… . Now this sensory-motor break finds its condition at a higher level and itself comes back to a break in the link between man and the world. …For it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world, but, on the contrary, it is because this world is intolerable that it can no longer think a world or think itself. …Man is not himself a world other than the one in which he experiences the intolerable and feels himself trapped. The spiritual automaton is in the psychic situation of the seer, who sees better and further than he can react, that is, think. Which, then, is the subtle way out?

11 Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, 39; Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 256–57.
12 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 189.
14 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 169–70.
In passages such as this, the body’s wounds of time—replete with sensory-motor ruptures and derailments—flow amidst the enigmatic resurrection of psychics, seers, spiritual automatons, and subtle exits: how are we to reconcile these potent allusions to sacred thought that seep into the cracks of this philosophical inversion? What is their role amidst this fragmentation between humanity and world? Tiredness and waiting…despair …The broken link between self and world…the incapacity to think or to act in an intolerable world…for Camus, the grim realization of the time of the body inevitably compels the feeling of the absurd:

[D]uring every day of an illustrious life, time carries us. …[Man] belongs to time and, by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. …The revolt of the flesh is the absurd. …The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.\textsuperscript{15}

On the surface, the strident atheism of Camus’s absurd provides something of a preparation for Deleuze’s own message for a cinema of faith in the body. Camus would take up the suspension of possibility, passion, imagination and hope to ask when, or if, the act of suicide is justifiable in the moment of meaninglessness. Conceptually, \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus} (1942) shares a natural empathy with the neo-realist mode of absurdity. One need only think of the child Edmund in Rossellini’s \textit{Germany Year Zero} (1948), and the harrowing descent of circumstances which lead to his incomprehensible suicide.\textsuperscript{16} In the final excruciating scene of his ‘death-walk,’ Edmund’s body becomes the essence of the sensory-motor breakdown. Here, the everyday banal body of Deleuze’s time-image may certainly evoke qualities that empathise with Camus, and certainly Sartre. Edmund is condemned to be free. Edmund commits patricide. Edmund, as seer, encounters the unreasonable silence and hostility of an intolerable world. In the existential crisis that follows, is it Edmund, or Edmund’s body, who chooses to die? “Not that the body thinks,” writes Deleuze, “but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life.”\textsuperscript{17} Yet in this moment of absolute despair, how can Edmund, as despairing man(child), learn to think what his “non-thinking body” is capable of against this final, irredeemable act of self-annihilation? “Something possible,” as Kierkegaard’s hero pleads, “or else I will suffocate…” Is there a subtle way out for Edmund, rather than this final exit, a way to eclipse the sensory-motor

\textsuperscript{15} Camus, \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus}, 12, 26.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Germany Year Zero}, in \textit{Roberto Rossellini’s War Trilogy}, dir. Roberto Rossellini (1948; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), Blu-ray.
\textsuperscript{17} Deleuze, \textit{Cinema} 2, 189.
collapse and restore the possibility of life? With so many spiritual landmines that permeate the cinema books, is it so strange to suggest that Deleuze’s cinema of faith relies not only upon his canonised orators of the body, but also upon the esoteric borrowings of *Kierkegaard*, for whom despair is the “spiritual paralysis” that seizes one in the wake of evil’s “stupifying, snake-like eye”?\(^\text{18}\) Edmund’s dislocated rhythms have broken with Bergson’s sensory-motor schema; he is Deleuze’s seer of an unbearable truth. As the poster child of modernity’s absurd post-war world, does he recapitulate the tenets of what Kierkegaard will call “the sickness unto death”, his actions capturing precisely the true paradox that Kierkegaard discovers between despair and faith? Here then, let us take a lengthy detour into Kierkegaard’s thought to locate the crossing between the absurd body in neo-realism, and the originally theological doctrine of despair.

**Kierkegaard: Despair and the Spirit of Immanence**

Death is not the last phase of the sickness, but death is continually the last. To be delivered from this sickness by death is an impossibility, for the sickness and its torment…and death consist in not being able to die. This is the situation in despair.

—Søren Kierkegaard\(^\text{19}\)

*The Sickness unto Death* begins as a burlesque. Beneath the guise of his pseudonymous storyteller, Anti-Climacus, Kierkegaard rewrites the biblical scripture, “‘This sickness is not unto death’ (John 11:4),” to capture the irony of such ‘death’ within the context of the Christian eternal life.\(^\text{20}\) With Kierkegaard, the utopian ideal of an end to the suffering of the theological body is abolished; now, as the unthinkable truth to both the finite and the infinite world, despair becomes, ironically and paradoxically, the force that would compel the possibility of spiritual freedom in *this life*, rather than the afterlife. Guided by an ever-increasing hostility toward Christianity’s complacency, conformity and corruption, such questions of authentic selfhood speak, for Kierkegaard, to the most *serious* of spiritual problems. Thus, still framed in the Christian setting, but as the satirical counterpoint to an age in decline, his peculiar conception of a sickness unto death—*despair*—is the universal

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\(^\text{19}\) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 154. For the existential significance of Kierkegaardian irony (including its liminal and ineffable significance), see K. Brian Söderquist, “Irony,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, 344–64.

\(^\text{20}\) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 144 (italics added).
ground of individual experience, refusing to distinguish between modes of faith, the lack of faith, or the imposture of faith. Yet, while despair’s indwelling disquietude—the “anxious dread of an unknown something”—marks the absurdity of the human situation as this universal state, its dreadful paradox eludes the “natural man”, the one who neither loves nor believes in God. Certain of despair’s finitude, there is no end to what the natural man thinks only concerns our “earthly and temporal suffering: want, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversities, torments, mental sufferings, sorrow, grief.” For the ‘heathen,’ all sufferings end in death, in the way that the righteous Christian thinks that in death, his suffering too will end, with his soul set free. Yet there is a qualitative difference between the two, for the Christian who studies despair to “think dauntlessly of everything earthly and worldly, including death”, learns that the “truly dreadful” is that undying despair which shudders eternally in the spirit: thus, despair is not exclusively confined to the finite world.

Kierkegaard condemns the “vulgar”, simplistic view of despair as being “content with appearances” in its inability to know the difference between truth and falsity: in the moment of absurdity, when one thinks or knows oneself to be in an unusual state of mania or melancholia, despair hides itself beneath the mask of the rare, rather than the universal, beneath transitory disorder rather than permanent affliction. More-over, the vulgar attitude supposes this fleeting glimpse into oblivion to be bound to the finitude of time, that despair will either move through us in the passage of life itself, or it will end with our death, however melancholic or mad we become.

Against this “gloomy” and “depressing” superficial view, Kierkegaard sees a latent, uplifting pedagogical purpose, for despair “seeks to shed light upon something that ordinarily is left in obscurity.” The object of illumination is, certainly, the need for a passion of faith to quell the existential crisis. Yet also within this is a need to rethink the nature of selfhood, so as to open out the possibility for becoming: despair illuminates the possibility for a transformation of thought regarding the immanent presence of eternity in time.

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21 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 155.
22 Ibid., 145.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 155–56.
26 Ibid., 155.
28 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 156–57.
makes the sickness something *finite*, and so preserves a boundary between the soul and the body. For Kierkegaard, and echoing the tradition of Renaissance mysticism, this sickness is a problem of the *spirit*, of the *subtle substance* that mediates the infinite soul and the finite body. Reminiscent of the melancholy *spiritus* of Marsilio Ficino, Kierkegaard’s spirit is the ethereal element which flows *between* body and soul, and so *between* time and eternity.\(^{29}\) In participating in the infinite, the spirit relates not only to time, but equally to the eternal. So too then, does despair.

For the natural man who lives more in his body than in his soul, eternity exists within him, yet it only appears as the fleeting glimpse of a harrowing oblivion in the most extreme existential circumstances, those dire situations which would provoke the unthinkable longing for the finite end: “when the danger is so great that death has become one’s hope, despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die.”\(^{30}\) Here again, despair is “this agonizing contradiction, this sickness in the self, everlastingly to die, to die and yet not to die, to die the death. For dying means that it is all over, but dying the death means to live the experience of death”\(^{31}\). And while Kierkegaard’s despairing man longs for an unattainable death by virtue of death’s absence, he squanders the possibility of life because, in the absence of *faith*, his authentic self remains unknown to him:

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Ah, so much is said of human want and misery…but only that man’s life is wasted who…never became eternally and decisively conscious of himself as spirit, as self, or…received an impression of the fact that there is a God, and that he, he himself, his self, exists before this God, which gain of infinity is never attained except through despair.\(^{32}\)
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There are then, two distinct modes of thought within which despair plays out its divine comedy. While the Christian comes to know the sickness unto death to be that despair which death itself cannot resolve, the atheist remains oblivious to the pedagogical possibility intrinsic to this truth, unable to realize that it is this unthinkable *eternal* despair that is the ground of a self *not yet* constituted; “the self…is the ground of despair.”\(^{33}\) Yet nor must the Christian assume he is a constituted self. In condemning the prolific pretender who lives

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\(^{29}\) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 157–58.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 151.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 159–60.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 151.
beneath the false mask of devotion to evade the grim truth of his existence, Kierkegaard argues that the only remedy for despair is its positive polarity, the passion of faith in God, which may only be acquired once one attains the state of spirit. Seeking the “light” of despair’s pedagogy of truth, one must no longer regard oneself as a transcendental soul that momentarily dwells in the body, or as a temporal body whose soul dwells in the mind: either way, one must learn to become spirit, to become the synthesis of the spiritual and the physical, so that the self may emerge in its authentic form:

> Man is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? … Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity… A synthesis is a relation between two factors. So regarded, man is not yet a self.\(^{34}\)

In another way, natural man, as despairing man, is, ironically, not yet a self, not merely because he neither loves nor has faith in God, but because he believes despair to belong solely to the movements of time. In the same sense, the Christian who privileges the eternal is also in need of reparation: thinking himself too much a soul and not quite a body, he must learn to think the spiritual possibilities of the sensuous form: “the movements of faith must constantly be made by virtue of the absurd, yet in such a way, be it observed, that one does not lose the finite but gains it in every inch.”\(^{35}\)

Ultimately, in this reciprocal circuit, “despair of infinitude is due to the lack of finitude”, just as “despair of finitude is due to the lack of infinitude.”\(^{36}\) This reciprocity forms the order of a spectrum Kierkegaard calls the “forms of sickness”, upon which despairing man’s diverse incarnations proliferate against the ‘fear and trembling’ of self-knowing. On one end of the scale, we find the delusional, “sensuous” man who unconsciously lives the lie of happiness rather than the truth of absurdity; on the other end, we are offered the contentment of the believer who accepts calmly and quietly that he despairs, and for whom everything is possible in this life through the movements of faith. At times infinitely comic, at others tragically ironic, the forms comprise Kierkegaard’s strata of qualitative differences in kind; articulating their respective potency or impotency, each reveals the extent to which a life is

\(^{34}\) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 146.

\(^{35}\) Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 48.

\(^{36}\) Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 163–68.
(or is not) able to live into the threshold of faith and despair, so as to become the free spirit of immanence:

The self is composed of infinity and finiteness. … The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the terms possibility and necessity. … The more consciousness; the more self; the more consciousness, the more will, and the more will the more self. … a self, every instant it exists, is in process of becoming, for the self (potentially) does not actually exist, it is only that which it is to become. … The self is reflection, and imagination is reflection, it is the counterfeit presentment of the self, which is the possibility of the self. Imagination is the possibility of all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.37

What is absurdity’s lesson, if possibility itself “is the only saving remedy” without which one cannot breath?38 If, for Kierkegaard, it is only through faith in God that all things become possible,39 the message of despair is one of dire irony. We are sick, yet we do not know it. We are not yet living an authentic spiritual life, and fail to grasp the measure of this. In becoming a spirit who is a self, we would learn to be dauntless in the face of death, we would learn to choose a life that accepts the burden of “the paradox of faith”,40 and live into the possibility of an authentic self. Through lessons that would practice the art of choice as a matter of freedom, in learning to choose authentically, the true Christian comes to understand that, to believe, by virtue of the absurd, means to “risk at every moment the freedom of choosing.”41 One must be ready to lose everything to have it returned, however impossible and unthinkable this remains for reason. The Christian has, in his reach, the possibility of attaining authentic selfhood, and in so doing, become Kierkegaard’s “knight of faith”, that rarest and highest individual who makes the leap of faith. In leaping, writes Bogue, “the future is genuinely open”.42 The knight of faith believes unwaveringly, without pause or doubt, that in surrendering the finite to the infinite, that which he sacrifices will absolutely be returned to him—not in the afterlife, but in this world of time—and by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of that which human reason simply cannot fathom.43 This is what Kierkegaard calls

37 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 162–164.
38 Ibid., 172.
39 Ibid., 172.
40 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 80–82.
42 Ronald Bogue, “To Choose to Choose,” in Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy, ed. D.N. Rodowick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 119, ebrary Proquest eBook Central.
43 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 49.
the practice of repetition, the movement of repeating for the creation of the future (rather than recollecting or representing the past) that becomes central to Deleuze. Most significantly, this ordeal of acquiring an authentic self, of attaining faith, is incommensurate with rational knowledge, for the order of reason is simply unable to dialogue with the “irrational” intellectual impenetrability of the absurd. Thus, in the leap of faith, the sacrifice is two-fold: not only must we surrender the finite—such as the body, life, or a loved one—but we must also surrender the infinite which, in Kierkegaard’s sense, is the faculty of reason that desires knowledge, wisdom, truth. While we may know that we suffer, we may only believe in the absurd. And while this absolute difference describes the historical drama between philosophy and religion, it is also what makes the knight of faith virtually non-existent.

Here then, is the ironic dilemma within the doctrine of despair: how are we to make the movements of faith if even Johannes de Silentio—Kierkegaard’s poet-narrator in Fear and Trembling—with all his love for God, cannot make the leap?

Kierkegaard’s Stages on Life’s Way

[H]e learns to imitate the other men, noting how they manage to live, and so he too lives after a sort. In Christendom he too is a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, hears and understands the parson, yea they understand one another; he dies; the parson introduces him into eternity for the price of $10—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become.

—Søren Kierkegaard

Toward the attainment of faith on the plane of immanence, Kierkegaard presents a series of stages, each animating a fork in the road of choice: either one’s choice is influenced by the vulgar sense of despair that would see authenticity compromised in some way, or one chooses, with quiet humility, the way of authentic selfhood. As Arjen Kleinherenbrink writes, the Kierkegaardian path to a life of authenticity is “a matter of purging our motives for acting of all contingency and temporal displacement. Only a relation of each present to an absolute can serve as sufficient ground to grant authenticity to our existence. Kierkegaard identifies four modes of acting that must be avoided if such a relation to the absolute is to be

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44 Bogue, “To Choose to Choose,” 115–32.
46 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 47.
47 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 186.
attained.” In the nostalgic mode of recollection, we “long for the restoration of a contingent past... Recollection is... a mode of living that stops life dead in its tracks by “an undoing of movement and a reversal of [life’s] course.” In the opposing mode of hope, we are prisoners of utopia, acting “on an envisioned future that may never become reality.” In the contingent mode of the aesthetic, we risk living too much in the privacy of undisclosed “desires and sentiments”, choosing sensory or imaginary experience over our relation with others, leading to a possible denial toward social participation. The fourth contingent mode of existence to be expunged is the ethical, which Kierkegaard defines as “undisclosed” and “universal”; here, we act in consonance with approved communal orders, yet in securing our place in the fold, we may lose our individuality to social conformity, becoming a “limb of a larger body.” Though the modes of recollection, hope, the aesthetic and the ethical still possess the possibility to “inspire noble and beautiful actions,” they are perilous for their underlying motives, where, as Kleinherenbrink continues, we risk “the surrender of one’s life” not to faith, but to falsehood: “Aesthetically, to worldly distractions; ethically, to social conformity; in recollection, to dreams of a past; in hope; to longing for a future.”

Through “the passion of faith”, the knight of faith lives in the mode that extinguishes these other four modes of contingency and temporal displacement. By evacuating the inauthenticity implicit to these modes, and by practicing the movements of faith—those acts of choice particular to each stage—this final immersion into the religious mode ensures the remedy of authentic selfhood against the falsity of the world. This is not as straightforward as it may appear however, for on the level of knighthood, there is not one kind of knight, but two; the true knight who practices the movements of faith without fanfare or accolade, and the false knight of “infinite resignation” who is endlessly seduced by the façade of appearance, and who demands an attentive audience so that he may perform his role of ‘true’ Christian in Christendom. This is the role that Johannes, Kierkegaard’s narrator, is given, playing it to

50 Ibid., 100–1.
51 Ibid., 101.
52 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 78.
54 Ibid.,
55 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 62.
56 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 155, 186.
perfection through a didactic, flamboyant rhetoric. While Johannes imagines the true knight as the ideal emblem of quiet humility and contentment (he paints the portrait of a tax collector no less: “I clasp my hands and say half loud, “Good Lord, is this the man? Is it really he? Why, he looks like a tax collector!”), he understands himself—his incapacity to live into the true mode of repetition—ironically: he sees a “manikin” of imposture, one who longs for faith but is unable to make the leap required to have the finite returned absurdly to him, regardless of his love for God, due to his choice to remain in the infinite realm of philosophical thought, through the practice of soul-body separation. Johannes lives this to the extreme:

For the act of resignation faith is not required, for what I gain by resignation is my eternal consciousness, and this is a purely philosophical movement which I dare say I am able to make if it is required, and which I can train myself to make, for whenever any finiteness would get the mastery over me, I starve myself until I can make the movement, for my eternal consciousness is my love of God, and for me this is higher than everything. …This movement I make by myself, and what I gain is myself in my eternal consciousness, in blissful agreement with my love for the Eternal Being. …But a paradoxical and humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith.

Within this unsettling refusal to live into the body through the act of fasting for God, the divide between the true and the false also expresses the difference between the quiet solitude of humility and the decadence of egoistic pride, for “he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself, he who loves God believingly reflects upon God.” Johannes is unable to attain the true. He cannot attain it, because in his love for God, and his practice of contemplation, Johannes lives too much in his soul than his body, the balance between the two ever evading him. Loving God, but unable to leap to Him, Johannes longs to learn the movements of faith:

[F]or the movements of faith must constantly be made by virtue of the absurd. …if I knew there was such a knight of faith, I would make a pilgrimage to him on foot… I would not let

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57 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 49.
58 Ibid., 90.
59 Ibid., 59.
60 Ibid., 47.
go of him for an instant, every moment I would watch to see how he managed to make the movements, I would regard myself as secured for life, and would divide my time between looking at him and practicing the exercises myself, and thus would spend all my time admiring him.  

Ironically, while the false knight would spend his life as a mimic, the true knight is never a teacher but only a witness to his dreadful responsibility of faith: this is the difference between the mode of earnest repetition and the false “punchinello’s” private theatre.  

This is also a way to grasp the knight of infinite resignation as existing in the ironic mode of existence. Where the true knight lives in solitude “without connections or pretensions”, the false knight is “sectarian”, a manikin who would unite with other elite manikins, and who would “leap away from the narrow path of the paradox and become a tragic hero at a cheap price.” In striving to affect the authentic posture of the true, in bolstering himself with the noisy company of other like-minded puppets, the false knight endlessly falls prey to the temptations of false honour. And while the knight of faith lives within the faith and guidance of his own instruction, the very idea of such unadorned quietude without earthly reward causes false knights to “leap aside”, for “they cannot bear the martyrdom of being uncomprehended, and instead they choose the worldly admiration of their proficiency.”  

Though the knight of infinite resignation surrenders the finite to the infinite for the love of God, he cannot risk the sacrifice of his intellect, however impossibly and unthinkably it might be returned to him in this life, by virtue of the absurd. Ultimately, between the leap of faith and the falsity of imposture, the overarching problem of choice harbours the irony of surrender: we must be careful not to surrender our life to the modes of contingency and temporal displacement which may irrupt within the false mode of faith, yet be willing to surrender entirely to the true spiritual mode. Unable to sacrifice the intellect to have it impossibly returned, “the ironic self” of Johannes is not yet a self, a spirit, and so he is not yet a body with the infinite freedom of possibility for the future.  

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62 Ibid., 89.  
63 Söderquist, “Irony,” 344.  
64 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 89–90.  
65 Ibid., 89.  
66 Ibid., 90.  
No doubt, at every turn, these are irreconcilable thoughts for the sceptic, the non-believer, the materialist or the naturalist to embrace: however poetic or romantic the leap’s aspiration, it comes to the postmodern reader in the wake of two major adversaries; the Nietzschean death of God, and the simultaneous, ironic realisation of religion’s continuing indifference to this death. Caught between the two, and in seeking a crossing between Kierkegaard’s existentialism and Deleuze’s cinema of the body, is postmodernity’s great challenge to reconcile ourselves with the (Heideggerian) problem of thought that Deleuze readily invokes in Cinema 2, the possibility that we ourselves are still not yet thinking?: “‘Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking.’” ⁶⁸ ...For in attempting to grasp a connection between the anthropological purpose of the cinematic human figure and an ethos of spirituality, the task is not so much to engage with the question of whether God does or does not exist, but to attempt to grasp Kierkegaard’s spirit of immanence through Deleuze’s eyes, in light of an unusual spiritual atheism that appears to permeate the cinema books. Deleuze is advancing a theory for cinema’s purpose through the possibility of unity: “Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. It is a whole transformation of belief.” ⁶⁹ Coming before cinema, Kierkegaard is already seeking to reunite humanity with its true self against an endemic falsity: between the Christian whose love for God has yet to ascend to the level of absurd faith, and the atheist who neither loves nor believes, where despair “views every man in the aspect of the highest demand made upon him, that he be spirit”, ⁷⁰ Kierkegaard’s wry assessment of humanity’s situation stands not only on the absurdity of faith’s leap, but on the foundational problem of an absence of faith. Similarly, for Deleuze’s perception of post-war Europe, absence not only comes to form the ground of religiously-emancipated conceptions of both existentialism (Sartre) and the absurd (Camus), but is central to the ethos of the time-image. Thus, the link between Kierkegaard’s spirit of immanence and Deleuze’s cinema of faith is central to the possibility of thinking the unthought—life, the body—beyond a purely atheistic reading.

As we shall now see, Kierkegaard’s philosophy of choice, given through the modes of existence, has a definitive presence in the cinema books, yet in contemplating the pedagogical possibilities of Deleuze’s credo of faith, the relation between despair and

⁶⁸ Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?, 3, quoted in Deleuze, Cinema 2, 156.
⁶⁹ Deleuze, Cinema 2, 172. Also see Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 53.
⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 155.
authenticity gives rise to a stranger question: is it Deleuze’s position that (the image of) the body in cinema possesses the power to make of us knights of faith because, like us, it too is not yet a self?

Kierkegaard’s Presence in the Cinema Books

What cinema advances is not the power of thought but its ‘impower’, and thought has never had any other problem. …this difficulty of being, this powerlessness at the heart of thought. …a cinema of Christian inspiration was not content to apply these conceptions but revealed them as the highest theme of the film, in Dreyer, Bresson, or Rohmer: the identity of thought with choice as determination of the indeterminable.

—Gilles Deleuze

Now, let us stay with Kierkegaard’s spirit of immanence, to see how it emerges in the cinema books. We saw that for Kierkegaard, a new image of faith is required, one which bears witness to an age of religious falsity and the “triviality” of its theological enterprise. In The Sickness unto Death, he creates despairing man, who is everyman, every life who fears not only death, but the possibility of the true self. In Fear and Trembling, he creates the knight of faith, the devout man of quietude who gazes at the infinite possibilities within life, of which love, death, and despair are a part: opposing the preposterous Christian poser whose salvation is purchased at the church door, the knight is the true self of authenticity, choice, and spiritual freedom. Between the two, Kierkegaard distinguishes between the real and the possible, a relation that becomes critical for Deleuze. Kierkegaard sees that one of the more pressing problems within this poetic image of the true Christian (the created model of possibility) that testifies to the disillusioning false (the real situation of existence) is the more complex difference between a love for God, and the ordeal involved in nurturing authentic faith in God, a distinction which allows him to propose a new philosophy or practice that pursues a love for life in the body of time, rather than the desire for death in the soul of eternity. For Deleuze and Guattari, Kierkegaard’s knight is the necessary “conceptual persona” who performs the role of spiritual exemplar and guide, so as to restore the possibility of an ideal

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71 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 166 and 177.
73 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 73–75. On the connection between Kierkegaard and ‘conceptual personae’, see Bogue, Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts, 175, 192.
mode for faith in a world of complacency, a world which naturally includes the philosopher. Their problem however, as scholars continue to note, is that Kierkegaard does not go far enough; he needs to perform an “empiricist conversion” for the concept of faith, one which allows immanence its absolute freedom from a necessary being named God. This does not, however, prevent Deleuze from drawing deeply from Kierkegaard to establish an existential grounding for Cinema 1:

A fascinating idea was developed from Pascal to Kierkegaard: the alternative is not between terms but between the modes of existence of the one who chooses. There are choices that can only be made on condition that one persuades oneself that one has no choice, sometimes by virtue of a moral necessity (good, right), sometimes by virtue of a physical necessity (the state of things, the situation), sometimes by virtue of a psychological necessity (the desire that one has for something). The spiritual choice is made between the mode of existence of him who chooses on the condition of not knowing it, and the mode of existence of him who knows that it is a matter of choosing. It is as if there was a choice of choice or non-choice. If I am conscious of choice, there are therefore already choices I can no longer make, and modes of existence that I can no longer follow—all those I followed on the condition of persuading myself that ‘there was no choice’. …the spiritual alternative is elsewhere, it is between the mode of existence of him who ‘wagers’ that God exists and the mode of existence of him who wagers for non-existence or who does not want to wager. …choice as spiritual determination has no other object than itself: I choose to choose, and by that I exclude all choice made on the mode of not having the choice. This was…to be the essential point of what Kierkegaard calls ‘alternative’, and Sartre ‘choice’, in the atheist version which he puts forward.

In Cinema 2, as if to provide the necessary bookend to this possibility of choosing choice itself, Deleuze recapitulates the same message, rendering cinema as something of an ark for the plurality of existential modes, where the spectrum of diversity and difference reenergizes those irresolvable questions that envelop absurdity and despair:

Now when the problem concerns existential determinations…we see clearly that choice is increasingly identified with living thought, and with an unfathomable decision. Choice no longer concerns a particular term, but the mode of existence of the one who chooses. This was already the sense of Pascal’s wager: the problem was not that of choosing between the

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75 Deleuze, Cinema 1, 114.
existence or non-existence of God, but between the mode of existence of the one who believes in God, and the mode of existence of the one who does not. ... Kierkegaard drew all the consequences of this: choice being posed between choice and non-choice (and all their variants) sends us back to an absolute relation with the outside, beyond the inward psychological consciousness, but equally beyond the relative external world, and finds that it alone is capable of restoring the world and the ego to us. ... The formidable man of good or the devout man (he for whom there is no question of choosing), the uncertain or indifferent (he who does not know how to, or is unable to choose), the terrible man of evil (he who chooses a first time, but can then no longer choose, can no longer repeat his own choice), finally the man of choice or belief (he who chooses choice or reiterates it): this is a cinema of modes of existence, of confrontation of these modes, and of their relation to an outside on which both the world and the ego depend. This point of the outside, is it grace, or chance?76

That nowhere in these two elaborate ruminations on the relation between thought and the variants of choice do we find a clear correlation between the body—as a force of movement in time, gesture and pose—and its mode of existence—as the chance or determination of the inner movement of choice and attitude—diminishes the possibility of bringing Kierkegaard easily into the fold of Deleuze’s body-thinkers. Across the vast spectrum of literature invested in a Deleuzian cinema of the body, the tendency is, more-often and understandably so, to carefully evade or omit those bodies of religion—those more esoteric modes which seem to wander the pages itinerantly as though lost themselves—so as to remain faithful to the legacy which prepares a more organic, desiring, machinic body for thought: Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Artaud... Deleuze’s canonised orators of the body are the “flesh”77 of the rich archive which continues to progress the seemingly infinite possibilities of a Deleuzian body of immanence. In concert, a mass consensus repeats Deleuze’s credo; the body is no longer the creation of God but of nature, no longer the body of sorrow that would sully the pursuit for absolute, eternal truth, but the catalyst for grasping the time of life and the forces of feeling:

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. ... To think is to learn what a non-thinking

76 Deleuze, Cinema 2. 177.
77 Ibid., 173.
body is capable of, its capacity, its postures. It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought.78

The idea that thought is the crossing upon which a ‘cinema of modes of existence’ meets a cinema of faith is beguiling for its atheistic sensibilities. With the body so affirmed as that which thought “plunges into”, this invocation of spirit is, for Cooper, neither a matter of soul nor afterlife, for Deleuze’s esprit “harnesses the dual sense of mind and spirit,” his “spiritual automaton…connected purely to the power of thinking”.79 Robert Sinnerbrink calls this cinema’s “ethico-existential imperative”, “a cinematic ethics of immanent conversion” which would “diagnose, respond to, and perhaps overcome” the nihilism endemic to the capitalist dystopia of “scepticism, lack of conviction, brutality and violence.”80 As a pedagogy for such dire modern straits—as a practice for the restoration of faith—a Deleuzian practice of film-philosophy more-often affirms the province of thought rather than spirit, resolved to questions of time rather than eternity, and to choices of life, death and limbo on the plane of immanence, rather than esoteric ruminations of death, liminality and afterlife on the plane of transcendence.

Is it here that we begin to sense the quiet convergence between a cinema of the body and a cinema of modes of existence, the culmination of which returns its peculiar pedagogy to Kierkegaard’s own lessons? For if it is the body that thought must “plunge into” to grasp the unthought of life, death, love, choice, freedom and possibility, is it not equally because, in the ethos and pathos of the lives of these bodies, it is both movement and time that we ourselves “plunge into”; movement-bodies that would create one kind of shock for thought’s subtle spirit, and time-bodies that would create another kinaesthetic-reflection circuit, one whose fragments and ruptures lead back to a “deeper memory” than that of any former present, “a memory of the world directly exploring time, reaching in the past that which conceals itself from memory.”81 If the cinema of belief is, as Lisa Trahair writes, the “secular corollary to Søren Kierkegaard’s religious belief as a leap of faith”, then it is so in one very peculiar, and relatively untouched, sense.82 As we are beginning to see, Kierkegaard’s leap of faith has

78 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 189.
79 Cooper, The Soul of Film Theory, 132.
80 Sinnerbrink, Cinematic Ethics, 62.
81 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 39.
everything to do with desiring and nurturing the _time of the self_, through the edification of the spirit who lives in the time of _this world_ through the body of feeling. This, I hope to argue, is the most profoundly provocative reason for searching out and restoring a Kierkegaardian _body of faith in time_ to Deleuze’s ‘orators of the body’: following Deleuze’s Kierkegaardian borrowings—the modes of existence, his ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd’, the possible (there are still more to come)—are we able to enfold this more complex spiritual contour within the organic action bodies of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Artaud and Bergson, all of which return to the _not yet_ of possibility? Soon enough, we will become intimately acquainted with Kierkegaard’s actual body as the conduit and catalyst for spiritual thought. For now, we must continue to trace the reasons for its obscuration through more recognisable paths.

The Subtle Way Out and the Spiritual Automaton: Esoteric Landmines for Atheistic Thought

Admittedly, if one comes to know Deleuze through his established orators of the body, the connection to Kierkegaard is difficult to reconcile, particularly in an age floundering in spiritual disillusionment, scepticism, cynicism, cliché and de-sacralisation. At times, Deleuze would seem to reroute philosophically dangerous terms such as _faith_ and _spirit_, choosing their more secular exchanges of _belief_ and _thought_, a gesture that fits well with his image as naturalist philosopher and radical atheist. Yet he is not quite so transparent or forthcoming with those other esoteric borrowings evocative of Christian mysticism introduced earlier, such as _the subtle way out_. Traditionally, in the history of ideas, _the subtle way out_ is not the way of the atheist, but the _alchemist_; it is the way of the _subtle_ or _astral_ body—the diaphanous body of _glory_ and _light_—whose practice generates a “profound feeling of freedom”, whose power is “exempt even from the law of karma, from the law of cause and

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85 For an interpretation of the link between “the subtle way out”, Deleuze, Artaud and thought (as distinct from Kierkegaard, the absurd and the in-between spirit), see Rodowick, “The World, Time,” in _Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze’s Film Philosophy_, 109–11.
effect”, and whose process of transformation opens the possibility to choose and to act freely in the gross world through the gross body.86 This is precisely the spirit that Kierkegaard summons for thought. When Deleuze speaks of the affective potency of cinematic movement, it is as if he too directly summons the mysticism of Ficino, for whom the vibration of music’s primordial tone naturally heals the melancholy spiritus:

It is only when movement becomes automatic that the artistic essence of the image is realized: producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly. …Automatic movement gives rise to a spiritual automaton in us, which reacts in turn to movement.87

In his treatise on self-preservation and well-being through musical practice, Ficino thinks “scholars must be particularly careful, since they lead a sedentary existence, are prone to melancholy, and are always using up their spiritus through the exercise of the imagination.”88 Does this not have an uncanny resonance with Deleuze’s enigmatic allusions for cinema’s apothecary charms? For Joshua Ramey, the connection between the mystic’s subtle body and the spiritual automaton—“a kind of golem that can transmit the spiritual sense of the world directly to the brain, bypassing ordinary physical and psychic capacity”—clearly reveals the pedagogical purpose of Deleuze’s time-image: in the catharsis of film’s visionary experience, cinema may “render a glorious or astral body, a subtle body” in the spiritually dormant spectator: this is the subtle way out, the “spiritual alternative” as Kierkegaard will say, the way of the spirit’s freedom, of thought’s choice.89

For Ficino, the subtle way out is the way of the spiritus—the possibility of edification, transformation and self-empowerment achieved through the practice of music. In kind, Deleuze alludes to the luminary vibrations of cinema as the shock that would similarly reawaken the spiritual automaton and reenergise thought. For ‘to give’ a body, has another sense for Deleuze, one which captures the subtle body in its essence: “there is another pole to the body, another cinema-body-thought-link”, the “ceremonial body” which cinema imposes

87 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 156.
88 Godwin, Harmonies of Heaven and Earth, 25.
89 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 151; Deleuze, Cinema 1, 114–16.
upon the banal everyday body of despair. “Sometimes,” writes Deleuze, “this cinema of the body mounts a ceremony, takes on an initiatory and liturgical aspect, and attempts to summon all the metallic and liquid powers of a sacred body…” No longer simply following the everyday body, cinema prepares, by virtue of the medium itself, visionary images of bodies that become “gracious and glorious”, bodies which equally become “grotesque” in the Carnivalesque masquerade that cinematic transfiguration naturally imposes through its forces of light and shadow. When, in the early stages of Cinema 1, Deleuze conjures the non-organic life of German Weimar silent cinema—the somnambulists, zombies, and golems of Lang and Murnau—it is to suggest the pedagogical possibility—the existential, cosmological message—of Expressionism’s (Kantian) dynamic sublime: this is the discovery of an indwelling luminous feeling of goodness against supernatural forces of darkness. Here, the full spectrum of cinema’s intensities of luminosity, darkness, shadow and chiaroscuro—all “shimmering, glistening, scintillation, sparkling, a halo effect, fluorescence, phosphorescence”—are drawn into the sublime, which enables the rediscovery of the wrath of God and the infinite in the spirit of evil:

In the dynamic sublime, it is intensity which is raised to such a power that it dazzles or annihilates our organic being, strikes terror into it, but arouses a thinking faculty by which we feel superior to that which annihilates us, to discover in us a supra-organic spirit which dominates the whole inorganic life of things: then we lose our fear, knowing that our spiritual ‘destination’ is truly invincible. …[the sublime] unleashes in our soul a non-psychological life of the spirit… which is the divine part in us, the spiritual relationship in which we are alone with God as light.

That Deleuze acts simply as passive messenger of such divine symbolism is possible. Yet throughout his cinema books, the ambiguity that surrounds such sacred borrowings opens toward something more, a kind of methodological mystery. How do we interpret such sublime incantations for a spirituality that is no longer purely connected to thought, but something beyond thought, something that acts upon the spiritual automaton to awaken us to the new, to restore us beyond our own somnambulism and anaesthesia, to shock us into

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90 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 190–91.
91 Ibid., 191.
92 Ibid., 190–91.
93 Deleuze, Cinema 1, 49–54.
94 Ibid., 53–54.
thinking and feeling, to arouse the body “which has been preserved and lives on in the holy shroud or the mummy’s bandages, and which bears witness to life, in this world as it is”? 95 Or rather, how do we begin to think a crossing between the Christian and the atheist, thought and spirit, belief and knowledge? In the later chapters of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze brings the essence of these earlier ruminations into the enclave of Artaud’s “cinema of cruelty”, where the disparate ideals of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche appear as ruins amidst Pasolini’s own crisis of faith:

Kierkegaard says, ‘the profound movements of the soul disarm psychology’, precisely because they do not come from within. … Thought finds itself taken over by an exteriority of a ‘belief’, outside any interiority of a mode of knowledge. Was this Pasolini’s way of still being Catholic? Was it on the contrary his way of being a radical atheist? Has he not, like Nietzsche, torn belief from every faith in order to give it back to rigorous thought? 96

Taken altogether, such reconfigurations of faith are only a few of the spiritual landmines, lacunas, shadows and crossings that permeate the cinema books. Across the movement-image and the time-image, amidst the gestural cast of mystics, psychics and seers, it is obscure allusions such as these—proclamations of bodies who would summon the vestiges of both an alluring archaism and a Christian mysticism—that remain curiously opaque against the more prolific readings of Deleuze’s cinema as the “immanent conversion of faith”, 97 as a cinema that chooses the attitude of the atheist rather than the Christian, of ethical thought rather than spiritual thought.

Amidst this eclectic wilderness of spiritual bodies, it is not surprising that for certain film scholars, Deleuze’s striking religious innuendoes—for a “Catholic quality” in cinema, for the ambiguous resurrection of Kierkegaard’s sacred existentialism especially—are deeply problematic, the implicit “theological leap” becoming the unsettling obstacle for cinema’s pedagogical possibilities. 98 Perhaps this is indicative of Kleinherenbrink’s reflection that a finer acknowledgement and appreciation of Deleuze’s Kierkegaardian influence remains ephemeral at best, however much “Deleuze consistently works with and through Kierkegaard

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95 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 173.
96 Ibid., 175–76.
98 For notable objections see Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics*, 64–65.
whenever he arrives at questions of the good life or of the best mode of existence.”

Surely, such a lacuna reveals a natural disinclination to provoke the precarious crossing between Christianity and atheism. This however, is a conservative estimation of the problem in relation to the fragment “Give me a body then”, and the problem of immanence that it courts so dangerously: ensnared in differences between a false and true Christian faith, between Kierkegaardian faith and Deleuzian belief, between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, between faith and knowledge, between despair and absurdity, between thought and spirit, between physical bodies and spiritual bodies, the fragment itself seems to have lost one of its more provocative contours for thinking cinema’s ability to reanimate and reimagine the possibilities of a body of immanence. Remaining variously beholden to the duration of Bergson, the ‘doing’ of Spinoza, the disorganisation of Artaud, and the earthy affirmation of Nietzsche, Deleuze’s body of immanence is yet to be thought as the borrowing and transfiguration of a Kierkegaardian spirit of immanence, a body that lives into the time of the self so as to become a subtle body “in this world, as it is”.

The Body of Absence: Not Yet a Body, Not Yet a Self

If the fragment “Give me a body then” is, as Deleuze writes, the philosophical reversal for the modern age, it is equally a testament to both the academy’s theological emancipation and modern philosophy’s confrontation with existence through the problem of immanence: as Ramey writes, where medieval conceptions of immanence and transcendence forge possible relations between God and creation, Spinoza (the “Christ of Philosophy” for Deleuze and Guattari) would notoriously identify God with nature, collapsing the distinction between God and creation, and annihilating the idea of God as transcendent. For Deleuze and Guattari, immanence is “the burning issue of all modern philosophy…It is not immediately clear why immanence is so dangerous, but it is. It engulfs sages and gods.” Ramey continues:

The achievement of Spinoza was that, rather than eliminate perfection, infinite power, or even eternity from the philosophical lexicon, Spinoza presented these divine dimensions as aspects

101 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 19.
102 Deleuze and Guattari, What is Philosophy?, 45.
of nature understood as one infinite substance: *deus sive natura*. For Deleuze, Spinoza’s inclusion or implication of divine perfections within (and as) the contours of the world constitutes a solution to the problem of modern philosophy: how to think the reality of the infinite as immanent to the perspective of a finite mind, and how to think finitude as an aspect of nature viewed as absolute substance. …transcendence has been completely absorbed into immanence. The essential modern problem, for Deleuze, is not that there is no longer a God to believe in, but that the world has taken on the attributes of God and, *mutatis mutandis*, the world has become uncanny, vertiginous.103

Thus, for Deleuze, modern philosophy’s efforts to think immanence as this infinite possibility continuously succumbs to the same temptation as theology, “the temptation to make immanence immanent to something else”, be it “God, humanity, or a transcendental ego”, meaning, in particular, the “miniature transcendences” of scepticism, humanism, Descartes’ cogito, Kant’s transcendental subject and Husserl’s phenomenological consciousness.104 Deleuze and Guattari would search for a new possibility for immanence, one which is free from such imperatives, finalities, and ultimatums. With Kierkegaard, they still find a man of transcendental faith, yet one who will “constantly recharge immanence”, and who is “concerned no longer with the transcendent existence of God but only with the infinite immanent possibilities brought by the one who believes that God exists.”105 As we have seen, Kierkegaard’s philosophy of choice is directly invoked in the cinema books, yet the possibility of a Kierkegaardian body that opposes a traditional theological body of sorrow still remains obscure, especially in the presence of more contemporary bodies which appear to make a more decisive break from religious thought.

**The Body without Organs**

We must believe in a sense of life renewed by the theatre, a sense of life in which man fearlessly makes himself master of what does not yet exist, and brings into being.

—Antonin Artaud106

Artaud never understood powerlessness to think as a simple inferiority which would strike us in relation to thought. It is part of thought, so that we should make our way of thinking from

105 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 74.
it, without claiming to be restoring an all-powerful thought. We should rather make use of this powerlessness to believe in life, and to discover the identity of thought and life…

—Gilles Deleuze

God becomes an invisible vanishing point, a powerless thought.

—Søren Kierkegaard

If the “embodied anti-theology” of Artaud’s body without organs (BwO) remains a principle figure for Deleuze and Guattari, it is so for its declaration of war against the organisation of the body’s organs, for its perverse desires, disorders, destabilisations and derailments of experimentation against the judgement of God and the order of the theological system. “The BwO,” writes Judith Poxon, “is process, flux, function, as opposed to the static identity of the theological body, the body-as-organism.” For Deleuze and Guattari, the BwO “is the field of immanence of desire”, not only gesturing to the “dreary parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies” of paranoia, hypochondria, schizophrenia, drugs (the “experimental schizo”) and masochism, but also those melancholy-free bodies “full of gaiety, ecstasy and dance.” In this sense, Artaud’s BwO is intensely Dionysian, a mass of creation and destruction, and equally the measure of Spinoza’s question, what can a body do? If the order of God—the order of existence as divine creation—depends on the existence of the body, if “God must depend upon the body”, then the BwO is, for Deleuze, nothing short of the Antichrist, to which Spinoza’s Ethics is the “great book”: with Guattari, he writes, Spinoza’s “attributes are types or genuses of BwO’s…The modes are everything that comes to pass: waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients, intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix.” The BwO is the experimental disintegration of the theological body, upon which we moderns are already “scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are

107 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 170.
108 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 78.
110 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 158.
112 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 150–58.
113 Ibid., 153.
114 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 292.
115 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 153.
fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love. …To be done with the judgement of God…” More-over, if a core distinction between the theological body and the BwO is one of being and becoming, it is so because the BwO is “not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices”: it is a body one makes or creates for oneself through a process of emptying out all of the orders imposed upon it (“The BwO is what remains when you take everything away”); it is an unruly and unholy experimentation with one’s limits and desires, its final realization never entirely acquired or reached (“you are forever attaining it: it is a limit.”).\(^{117}\) Ironically however, like the *spiritual automaton*, the BwO cannot entirely escape its alliance with a more mystical past. For William Behun, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the BwO resurrects the body of light’s alchemistic mode of freedom and choice through its emancipation from fixed determinations, as it prepares a pathway for becoming a radical force of political, social and artistic change:

The spiritual body or the body of light is watery, mercurial, protean. It has not been fixed; it is still volatile, open to all possibilities—nothing can limit it. …the possibilities of action become limitless. Potentialities, intensities and flows are allowed to take their own courses without being predetermined by physical, moral, or karmic law. …The BwO is a way of experiencing the world that is not determined in advance by any system of lawfulness. It is a body of freedom, free even from the determination of the dichotomy between freedom and determinism. …The world is no longer experienced as a lawfully determined system, as a cosmos, but rather as a chaos of possibility liberated from the construction of laws systematically imposed by capital and its allied systems of power. …The making of the BwO is an act that transforms our way of engaging and living in a world.\(^{118}\)

Against the infinite possibilities immanent to this potent figuration of a body of freedom, it is little wonder that a *Kierkegaardian* body of immanence, steeped in the ordinances of divine love, remains occluded from view: against so much perversity, chaos, intervention and euphoria, the modesty and quietude of authentic self-knowing is, admittedly, comparatively unsensational.

\(^{116}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 150.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 149–50.

\(^{118}\) Behun, “The Body of Light,” 131–32.
That Deleuze’s summons for a body invites the affirmation of an atheistic sensibility is, inevitably, the measure of the field that follows in his wake. In the age of the Nietzschean death of God, and amidst the throng of a naturalist atheism that Deleuzian film-philosophy celebrates, it is unsurprising that Kierkegaard’s existentialism is yet to be brought into the fold of the secular work that continues to “plunge into” a Deleuzian body of immanence.\(^\text{119}\) As Ramey argues so eloquently, is this not almost certainly because Deleuze himself is yet to be thought beyond the identity of a “stridently naturalistic” and “strictly materialist philosopher”, that he is yet to be appreciated as the unlikely herald of hermetic truth, as uncanny messenger of “secrets of immanence”, as a philosopher whose practice is grounded in the “spiritual ordeal” of seeking out original thought?\(^\text{120}\) These are indeed heady sentiments. If the creation of a cinema of faith in \textit{the body} is just such an ordeal, could Kierkegaard be one such secret that lies within, rather than in opposition to, the proclamations made by Deleuze’s more renowned orators of the body? And is this perhaps the canny wager of a philosopher who studies the ruins of representation, who gauges a mass \textit{habitus} of secularised western thought that would, like a faulty divining rod, guide our earnestly intended philosophical reflection on the practices of faith toward a \textit{false}, rather than \textit{true}, problem?\(^\text{121}\) To believe, or not to believe; to choose time, or to choose eternity; the body or the soul; presence or absence; life or death: Kierkegaard’s aim is to educate us away from such simplistic dichotomies. In kind, Deleuze chooses to believe in cinema as a pedagogy, to believe in the movement and time of the body of feeling—not as a concept, but as a practice—for the simple reason that in cinema, it is the \textit{feeling} of movement and the \textit{feeling} of time, that a true cinema restores to us. With Deleuze, we see that cinema is not unlike Kierkegaard himself as it recharges immanence. And what Ramey says of Kierkegaard’s influence, we could say of cinema: it “reenergize[s] the gesture of exposing the mind to a series of essentially unsolvable questions: Who am I in the face of an unknown God? Where am I in a decentred world? What am I in the face of my obscure material potencies?”\(^\text{122}\)

How might we think Kierkegaard without thinking religion? Or rather, how do we catch a glimpse of Kierkegaard’s faith through Deleuze’s eyes? For as Ramey reminds us, the properly modern problem for Deleuze is “not how to distinguish the religious as opposed to

\(^\text{119}\) Kleinherenbrink, “Art as Authentic Life,” 98–99, 104; Baugh, “Private Thinkers, Untimely Thoughts,” 314.
\(^\text{120}\) Ramey, \textit{The Hermetic Deleuze}, 1–9.
\(^\text{121}\) Deleuze, \textit{Bergsonism}, 15.
\(^\text{122}\) Ramey, \textit{The Hermetic Deleuze}, 14.
the irreligious, the pious from the impious, but rather to discern the effects of different practices of belief.”123 If we require messengers and lessons for a life of freedom, perhaps it becomes a matter of burrowing into age-old spiritual orders, rather than eliminating or evading them, so as to reimagine and create the world anew: if it is a matter of forging strange relations between traditionally incommensurate thought-systems and unusual pairings, a matter of drawing out connections beneath, through and across the surface of things, it is no less a process and practice of alchemic transfiguration, one that no longer moves between the real and the represented, but between the real and the possible.

Presence and Absence in the Cinema of Spiritual Paralysis

The modern fact is that we no longer believe in this world. We do not even believe in the events which happen to us, love, death, as if they only half concerned us. It is not we who make cinema; it is the world who looks to us like a bad film. …What is in play is no longer the real and the imaginary, but the true and the false.

—Gilles Deleuze124

That an irreconcilable divide arcs between the orders of orthodox religion and Deleuze’s celebrated credo for a violent atheism is clear. The cinema books are taken to be a testament to this while recognising the sheer difficulty of the medium’s ethical challenge: “Restoring our belief in the world, restoring our reason…It is doubtful if cinema is sufficient for this; but if the world has become a bad cinema, in which we no longer believe, surely a true cinema can contribute to giving us back reasons to believe in the world and in vanished bodies?”125 As we are also beginning to see, the cinema books equally reveal Deleuze’s captivation with certain mystical practices, and for advancing philosophical riddles and aporias through such esoteric borrowings. That so much is left unclarified by Deleuze himself means that certain crossings and connections remain ambiguous, unstable; between Christian and atheist, belief and knowledge, spiritus and thought. Yet we must continue to remind ourselves that Deleuze’s immanent conversion is not so much the overturning of a Christianity that would divide the transcendental, eternal soul from the immanent body of time, however much this is a natural consequence of the field that follows in his wake. Deleuze is a radical atheist, this is indisputable. Even so, this does not prevent him from drawing deeply from those complex

123 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 13.
124 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 171 and 274.
125 Ibid., 201.
philosophies of existence that are inordinately spiritual, and which pursue a unique and progressive pathway toward a new conception of the free spirit. Nietzsche rumbles beneath all of this, of course, the irony of cinema’s “special relationship with belief” inviting Deleuze to take an equally ironic stance on modernity’s inability to relinquish the habitus of religious thought: “Cinema seems wholly within Nietzsche’s formula: ‘How we are still pious.’”  

Is Deleuze’s summons for a body then intensely ironic? Does it court diverse avatars, schisms, transformations and mutations of existential desire at one and the same time? What is the promise innate to Kierkegaard’s sacred practice of thought, if not its own transcendental overturning? In the cinema books, the most direct qualification of a difference between Christian and Kierkegaardian faith appears in Cinema 1, where Deleuze takes up a very particular crossing that emerges within the folds of philosophy, religion and cinema. Troubling the ephemeral convergence between faith and knowledge, Deleuze simultaneously distinguishes between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, through the notion of restoration that binds the acting body to the cinema of faith:

This extreme moralism which is opposed to morality, this faith which is opposed to religion, is a strange way of thinking. It has nothing to do with Nietzsche but has much to do with Pascal and Kierkegaard, with Jansenism and Reformism…It weaves a whole set of relations of great value between philosophy and the cinema. …in philosophy, as in the cinema, in Pascal as in Bresson, in Kierkegaard as in Dreyer, the true choice, that which consists in choosing choice, is supposed to restore everything to us. It will enable us to rediscover everything, in the spirit of sacrifice…Kierkegaard said that true choice means that by abandoning the bride, she is restored to us by that very act: and that by sacrificing his son, Abraham rediscovers him through that very act. 

If this spirit of sacrifice, and this strange faith which would oppose religion, has “nothing to do with Nietzsche,” it equally has nothing to do with the death of God or the melancholic mourning for a lost divine realm. As Paola Marrati reinforces, “our problem is not the absence of God but instead our absence from this world.” With Daniel Barber, we can take

126 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 171.
this striking distinction further to suggest that this loss is intimately connected with the imagination:

To imagine is to make the world; to call for a different imagination, or to imagine differently, is to make a different world. We should, in virtue of these claims, interpret Nietzsche’s proclamation as having less to do with God’s existence than with the world produced by the imagination of God’s existence. It is a proclamation that concerns theology, but it is just as much one that concerns what is at stake in making a world. …God’s death, as well as God’s life, stands or falls on the power of the imagination.¹²⁹

Barber’s relation between spirituality and imagination is provocative for its finer allusions to a man-made world bereft of self-presence, a problem that, for Simon O’Sullivan also, inevitably returns to human acts of creation. Following Deleuze and Guattari, O’Sullivan perceives art as a dynamic encounter with the unrecognisable, rather than the passive act of recognition, an encounter where we are “forced to thought”, and where, through the process of rupture and affirmation, and in the presence of this possibility of something new, our habitual mode of acting and thinking is overwhelmed. True art, though rare, opens us to the possibility of becoming inventors of life’s new possibilities, of becoming the rogue trader of mad thoughts and courageous choices that remain unsanctioned by the orders of habitus and which annihilate the ruins of representation. In this sense, O’Sullivan understands Deleuze and Guattari’s own work to bear witness to such transformation:

Art, in breaking one world and creating another brings these two moments of rupture and affirmation into conjunction. …Deleuze and Guattari’s writing can itself be positioned as an experiment in thinking differently, ‘beyond’ representation…[offering] us a ‘new image of thought’, one in which process and becoming, invention and creativity, are privileged over stasis, identity and recognition.¹³⁰

Taken altogether, the interrelated problems of an absence from the self, the spirit of sacrifice, the imagination’s creation of the world, and this possibility of the new all resonate deeply with a Kierkegaardian philosophy. In the cinema books, they are also the co-ordinates of Deleuze’s credo for a restoration of faith. As Marrati already explains, the most pressing

¹²⁹ Barber, Deleuze and the Naming of God, 2.
¹³⁰ O-Sullivan, Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari, 1–2.
issue for Deleuze is our own absence of self from the world. Ultimately then, cinema’s anthropological, theological and political stakes for hoping and imagining a world inevitably return to the ancient problem of presence and absence, and the critical need for rethinking the institutionalised, unassailable meanings attributed to this binary. For Deleuze, the cinematic encounter offers the possibility to relinquish thought’s ‘rational’ leap to transcendental enclosures, to renegotiate the problem of presence entirely, and to rethink the leap of imagining beyond rationality itself: “The question is no longer: does cinema give us the illusion of the world? But: how does cinema restore our belief in the world?” Thus, if, as Barber writes, Nietzsche’s “theopolitical proclamation…concerns both God and the task of making the world, but…always and only…by way of the imagination”, it is, for Deleuze, the imagination’s mode of thought, aimed toward the creation of an unknown future, rather than memory’s mode of recognition, recollection and representation, that a true cinema would invoke, moving us away from a cosmology of origination grounded in the binary of presence and absence. We will soon see that, for Deleuze, this act of creative intervention which leads into the credo for a cinematic restoration of faith, has deep ties with both the Kierkegaardian mode of repetition and the Nietzschean mode of eternal return. Towards this, let us continue to retrace the steps that lead into the possibility of thought’s transformation, where the ontology of the cinematic human figure will converge with the ethos and pathos that marks its mode.

Towards Deleuze’s reconfiguration of the real and the represented, we see that the illusion of a threshold between the traditional placements of presence and absence—through this figure that exists between time and eternity, body and soul, between this world and another—can no longer be thought strictly in terms of its anthropological “utilitarian purpose” as Bazin understands it: for Deleuze, presence and absence no longer speak to cinema’s conjurations of divine immortalisation against our inevitable, unthinkable death; the problem can no longer be grasped by deconstructing the polarities of reality and representation. In the wake of so much disillusionment, anaesthesia, spiritual paralysis and psychological catatonia, it is no longer possible to theorise the significance of the archaic double or spectre as it relates to a memory of the world and the consolations of immortal desire, however counter-intuitive.

131 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 181–82.
132 Barber, Deleuze and the Naming of God, 2.
this seems. *The problem*, Deleuze and Guattari say with a clear gesture to Kierkegaard’s knight of faith, *has changed*:

> [O]n the new plane [of immanence], it is possible that the problem now concerns the one who believes in the world, and not even in the existence of the world, but in its possibilities of movements and intensities, so as once again to give birth to new modes of existence, closer to animals and rocks. It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today. This is the empiricist conversion (we have so many reasons not to be believe in the human world; we have lost the world, worse than a fiancée or a god). The problem has indeed changed.133

If, for Deleuze, cinema bears witness to a world of sleepers-aware, of driftwood souls lost to the world and to themselves, it is not only a matter of living with ghosts, but of how we have become ghosts ourselves. In Italian neo-realism’s “empty or deserted spaces” (the any-space-whatever) Deleuze sees bodies, like Edmund’s, “suffering less from the absence of another than from their absence from themselves…this space refers back to the lost gaze of the being who is absent from the world as much as from himself…”.134 In this sense, cinema must reckon with an endemic spiritual impotence that cakes a world stricken by nihilism, a world consumed by an utter disintegration of self-presence: “Order has collapsed, as much in the states of the world that were supposed to reproduce it as in the essences or Ideas that were supposed to inspire it. The world has become crumbs and chaos. …It is no longer a matter of saying, to create is to remember—but rather, to remember is to create…”135

In its simplest distillation, this means that for both cinema and philosophy, it is no longer the absurdity of *death* that the affective circuit of the cinematic body and philosophical thought must respond to, but the absurdity of *life*. If the image-body “affects the visible with a fundamental disturbance and the world with a suspension, which contradicts all natural perception”, if this encounter possesses the power to shock thought out of its disenchantment and catatonia, it is not least because of a peculiar charm intrinsic to the body that cinema naturally prepares for thought, a body that can no longer be thought as the lesser other to the real theatre body:

133 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 74–75.
134 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 9.
We have to go back to a very old problem, which already brought theatre and cinema into opposition. Those who deeply loved the theatre objected that cinema always lacked something, *presence*, the presence of bodies which remained the prerogative of theatre: cinema only showed us waves and dancing corpuscles with which it simulated bodies. When André Bazin takes up the problem, he looks for a sense in which there is a different mode of presence, a cinematographic one, which rivals that of theatre and may even outdo it with different methods. But if cinema does not give us the presence of the body and cannot give us it, this is perhaps also because it sets itself a different objective; it spreads an ‘experimental night’ or a white space over us; it works with ‘dancing seeds’ and a ‘luminous dust’… the object of cinema is not to reconstitute a presence of bodies, in perception and action, but to carry out a primordial genesis of bodies…. The problem is not that of a presence of bodies, but that of a belief which is capable of restoring the world and the body to us on the basis of what signifies their absence.  

Here again, we see that for Deleuze, *absence* no longer designates the sense of existential loss or lack that grounds Bazin’s ontology of the image. Though still embalmed in its luminous mould, the body is no longer given as the immortalised resurrection of its model that would defy the ontological divide between presence and absence; now, the body becomes the locus for *bearing witness* to self-absence, for testifying to the absence of feeling and imagination, for becoming the ‘seer’ who is suddenly awakened to this lacuna that drifts between the inner self and the outer world. If it is a body of absence, it is so in the sense that it is a body bereft of *belief* in the possibility of *time*, a body of the *time-image*—the archetypal image of the absent modern attitude itself. Following Rossellini again, Deleuze finds such absence to be the essence of the everyday, dystopian, post-war reality, the banal body of despair becoming the “seer who finds himself struck with something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought.”

Far worse than Kierkegaard’s knight of infinite resignation and natural despairing man—both of which are already bereft of faith—the problem of absence has indeed changed, and in more than one sense. This particular body of absence is no longer a universal concept that stands for *all* bodies (and as such *all* bodies in *all* cinemas and *all* movements, as it does for film musicology’s argument for presence): as the broken spirit explicit to post-war survival in

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136 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 201–2.  
137 Ibid., 169–71.
a capitalist asylum, it is peculiar to a moment in history, its attitudes, gestures and postures of authentic sensory-motor breakdown ushering in the most serious contour of a cinema of the absurd. For Deleuze, the suspension of sentience—passion, hope, imagination and feeling—that comes with the body’s rupture can no longer be thought in technological terms: this absence of inwardness—consciousness, sentience—is not down to a theft performed by the cinematic medium, but the loss of possibility in life itself.

For Kierkegaard, the question of living a life of true possibility, rather than simply surviving its absurdity before dying, already involves crossings between ontology and ethos, knowledge and pathos, despair and faith. More-over, possibility itself turns on the balance between passion and imagination, where “all existential problems are passionate problems, for when existence is interpenetrated with reflection it generates passion.” In *Fear and Trembling*, the universality of his credo is more pronounced: “Faith is a miracle, and yet no man is excluded from it; for that in which all human life is unified is passion, and faith is a passion.” Surely, this appeal for a unity of humanity has an uncanny resonance with Deleuze’s own credo, and with the (Eurocentric) universality implicit to its restoration against an endemic lack of passion. “Whether we are Christians or atheists….” When Deleuze calls upon Rossellini, it is precisely to counter the impotence of a western world bereft of passion and imagination, and to challenge absurdity and despair with an anthropological imperative: “the less human the world is, the more it is the artist’s duty to believe and produce belief in a relation between man and the world, because the world is made by men.” For Deleuze, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are just such artists. Passionately and dramatically, both provide lessons for practicing a meaningful life in an age steeped in the sewers of impotence, their works acting as testaments to what Kierkegaard despairs as the ironic mask of an “exanimate body”, a body whose underlying faithlessness realizes a kind of tragic comedy:

> Our age reminds one vividly of the dissolution of the Greek city-state: everything goes on as usual, and yet there is no longer anyone who believes in it. The invisible spiritual bond which gives it validity no longer exists, and so the whole age is at once comic and tragic—tragic

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139 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 77.
140 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 172.
141 Roberto Rossellini, quoted in Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 171; see 311 n29.
because it is perishing, comic because it goes on. For it is always the imperishable which sustains the perishable, the spiritual which sustains the corporal; [if] an exanimate body could for a little while continue to perform its customary functions, it would in the same way be comic and tragic.  

With Deleuze, the exanimate tragic comedy of the man-made world has eclipsed even this, becoming the worst kind of cliché, the ‘bad film’ of the living dead who is dead inside; with no presence to life or love, the world remains the scene of an endemic spiritual paralysis, hung in the simulacrum limbo of a copy of a copy of a copy... For Kierkegaard, “possibility is the only power to save...the only saving remedy; given a possibility, and with that, the desperate man breathes once more, he revives again; for without possibility man cannot, as it were, draw breath.” If Deleuze charges the true artist with the role of curing the real and curating the possible, it is not because the artist is somehow blissfully beyond or removed from the existential crisis of freedom and authenticity. It is because the true artist already feels the deadbolt of time, still hopes to feel enough to think, and to dread the possibility of a life without creativity’s breath. Beyond the simplistic categories of “Christian” and “atheist”, it is already the artist who practices the pain of living authentically, seeking out imagination and passion beneath the rubble of religion, as Deleuze himself does. It is already the artist who must, in Kierkegaard’s words, practice the movements of faith, by virtue of the absurd, so as to become a spirit of immanence.

In this dire sense, with the loss of self-presence and the endless effort to reclaim its power, Deleuze’s immanent conversion of faith is, as Marrati will say, “more profound and more significant than conventional rifts between religion and atheism or than debates on secularization or, conversely, on the return of the religious. ...The true modern problem is thus the problem of a faith that can make the world liveable and thinkable once again”. Within this, the critical differences between Christian orthodoxy and Kierkegaardian immanence, between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, between Kierkegaardian faith and Deleuzian belief, between the ‘stock’ orators of the body and an unheard orator, are the ropes that bind the fragment, “Give me a body then”. If these crossings are not complicated enough,

143 Kierkegaard, The Sickness unto Death, 172.
144 Marrati, Gilles Deleuze, 88.
we must also attempt to think between ontology and ethos through the conduit of the *acting body*.

For Joe Hughes, the enigma of faith that haunts Deleuze’s acting body simply cannot be resolved by studying *Cinema 2* alone, but by turning to his greater oeuvre. Following Deleuze and Guattari, and aimed precisely toward a cinema of faith in the body, Hughes repeats that in the case of a cinematic restoration of immanence, this difference regarding the nature or purpose of belief is less a matter of a theology that arises in the contexts of historical fact, narrative, theme and directorial inclination, than one of anthropology. Yet here, the concept of faith loses all sense of sensual pathos and passion, in finding its broader synthesis between ethos and truth:

[I]n *Cinema 2*, the concept that names the link between man and the world, is faith. … [However, to] believe or not to believe says nothing about the existence or non-existence of God…It does not imply a hidden, secret, or (un)known relation with the divine or a channel to transcendence. It is strictly anthropological. The idea of God’s existence results in one possibility of life; the idea of his non-existence results in another. …The concept of faith, then, seems to signify the way in which an Idea—in this case, that of God—determines a mode of existence and might even open up ‘infinite immanent possibilities’ of life. To give the concept of faith its broadest possible extension, we could say that it describes our ‘relationship to truth’.¹⁴⁶

Undoubtedly, this striking distinction allows Hughes to see Kierkegaard’s concept of faith through Deleuze’s eyes, whereby the concepts of immanence, possibility and modes of existence undergo an empiricist transfiguration which Hughes argues ultimately has more to do with Hume, Spinoza and Bergson, than Pascal or Kierkegaard.¹⁴⁷ Yet within this image of faith, too much of the anthropological is left out: the force of imagination, the leap, the passion that compels the leap, the absurd that ever accompanies this faith, a theatrical rhetoric of humour and irony that would restore a sense of mad fable to the quest for truth; all of these vital components that encircle the desire for an ideal mode of existence, the very components that allow us to think a Kierkegaardian body beyond the theological body of sorrow, remain occluded from view. As we will later see, with Deleuze, the concept of

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leaping becomes far more sophisticated than is often acknowledged, taking on an explicitly
theatrical, burlesque significance in relation to Kierkegaard’s ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd.’
Admittedly, this is in no way obvious in the cinema books. And given the serious nature of
Hughes’ enquiry, such omissions are entirely appropriate. However, in his opening discourse
on Deleuze’s ‘deduction’ of the body in Cinema 1—Deleuze’s critique of Bergson’s ‘image-
body’ in relation to the cinematic image of the body—Hughes’ desire to “make sense” of
Deleuze’s cinema of faith nonetheless conjures an image of subjectivity and possibility
which, once more, recalls that of Kierkegaard’s immanence, and as it does, summons the
pedagogical crossing between ontology and ethos. The catalyst for his quandary is one of
Deleuze’s more alchemically esoteric readings of the Bergsonian body as image.

Bergson’s Gaseous Body as the ‘not yet’: A Crossing between Ontology and Ethics

But in reality the body is changing form at every moment; or rather, there is no form, since
form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the continual change of form:
form is only a snapshot view of transition.

—Henri Bergson

A thought is a force in motion, an action, energy which changes.

—Eugenio Barba

I look only at the movements.

—Søren Kierkegaard

What we must do is reach the photographic or cinematic threshold…When Kierkegaard adopts
the marvellous motto, “I look only at the movements,” he is acting astonishingly like a precursor
of the cinema…

—Deleuze and Guattari

For Deleuze, Bergson’s body—as one image among others participating in movement’s vast
circuit of reciprocity—is “ahead of its time”, existing as “a gaseous state” on the plane of
immanence, where “universal variation…undulation…rippling” constitutes “the universe as

149 Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House, trans. Judy Barba (London: New York:
Routledge, 2010), 84.
150 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 49.
151 Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 281.
cinema itself, a metacinema” of image, movement, matter and light. Bergson writes, “You may say that my body is matter, or that it is an image…My body, an object destined to move other objects, is, then, a center of action; it cannot give birth to a representation.” With Deleuze, Bergson’s body of action becomes, for cinema, the participatory sensory-motor circuit of subjectivity immersed in the “cosmic eddying of movement-images”, through the avatars of the perception-image, affection-image and action-image. No longer beholden to a preordained determinism, be it the laws of destiny, karma, or God’s will, the body of action is a “centre of indetermination”, a force which is able to choose to take action in the world, a presence that feels utterly ‘at one’ with its place in the world, and which, participating sensorily in the world, feels a sense of unity, connection, purpose and meaningfulness: even in moments of discord and disharmony, it is able to choose, even if the choice is to do nothing. For Deleuze, this body, with its avatars of perception, affection and action, is the link between humanity and the world, it is the nucleus of ourselves as “living matter or centres of indetermination”. As Hughes writes, Bergson’s body is the threshold between subjectivity and the plane of immanence, the hyphen, or interval, between the self and the world of movement and time. If the pure quality of affection is the locus of Bergson’s duration (the time of the self), it is so because affection is the feeling of time. For Bergson, real time is not the time of clocks and measures, chronology and science. Real time is the indivisible, immeasurable flow which is itself consciousness, the infinitely expanding site of the virtual world that we ourselves are becoming through every moment. Duration is the fluid concertina through which the rhythms of consciousness flow, “the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances.” As the sensed, felt time of the inner reality, duration is the ether of subjectivity itself, the virtual sensual-haptic “form of the formless” that saturates memories, perceptions, sensations, emotions, contemplations, imaginings, dreams and desires—all immeasurably flowing forms, all with their own peculiar expansions and contractions, prolongations and protractions, accelerations and decelerations.

In Bergsonism, Deleuze summarises duration as “essentially memory, consciousness and freedom. It is consciousness and freedom because it is primarily memory.” Thus, in the

152 Deleuze, Cinema 1, 58–60.
154 Deleuze, Cinema 1, 68.
155 Ibid., 65.
156 Ibid., 65.
157 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 5.
158 Ansell Pearson, Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual, 169.
159 Deleuze, Bergsonism, 51.
cinema, as the threshold between perception and action, the affection-image is the pure quality of duration. More-over, it is the conduit through which the relation between ontology and ethos also channels the two principle senses of the acting body:

[The action-image] is the second material aspect of subjectivity. And, just as perception relates movement to ‘bodies’ (nouns), that is to rigid objects which will serve as moving bodies or as things moved, action relates movement to ‘acts’ (verbs) which will be the design for an assumed end or result. …There is an in-between. Affection is what occupies the interval…. It surges in the centre of indetermination, that is to say in the subject, between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action.\(^\text{160}\)

More-over, the interval of affection within Bergsonian duration is the state or quality which simultaneously precedes, prepares and harbours the sensory-motor breakage of Deleuze’s “crisis of the action-image”, the mode which manifests neo-realism’s time-image, the testament to modernity’s spiritual inertia and paralysis. If subjectivity may be thought in terms of perception, action and affection, then affection, as the interval of the movement-image that gives way to fragmentation and suspension, may certainly be thought as the threshold upon which a Kierkegaardian despair also stands, its own caesura of possibility, and of action, disclosing the nature of the sensory motor breakdown. This means that in the absence of hope, imagination, passion and faith, the mode of sensorial subjectivity that now confronts the absurdity of existence in the time-image can no longer be thought as entirely Bergsonian. As Hughes argues, if there is a “central difference between Deleuze and Bergson” it is that “in Bergson the subject becomes active too quickly.”\(^\text{161}\) It is at this point that Hughes begins his own meditation on the anthropological, rather than theological, significance of Deleuze’s cinema of faith, intent to “secularize belief fully”, by submitting “this link between ‘truth’ and ‘modes of existence’ to an empiricist conversion. God is no longer the truth. Truth is knowledge understood as the production of a rule for the future.”\(^\text{162}\)

Why work so hard to demand an image of Deleuze as radical atheist when his work clearly demonstrates a more provocative image of spiritual atheism? Why not follow his allusions and aporias all the way into the Kierkegaardian maze that coils through all the subtle,

\(^{160}\) Deleuze, Cinema 1, 65.
\(^{161}\) Hughes, “Believing in the World,” 81.
\(^{162}\) Ibid., 86.
glorious bodies of perception, affection and action to grasp a deeper legacy for the time of the self, one that comes before Bergson? The gaseous body that Deleuze registers is, I suggest, another thread that quietly binds a Kierkegaardian cinema of the absurd to a Deleuzian cinema of restoration of faith in the body. Here, I am not so concerned with nuancing Bergson’s own project regarding morality, faith, authenticity, subjectivity and religion, for, however marginally, Bergson already enjoys a presence in speculative theories on a Deleuzian spirituality of cinema. As Michael Goddard shows, the creative evolution of Bergson’s élan vital (the vital impulse) readily provides a pathway to think the crystalline time-image encounter “as an existential practice of subjectivation”, a process which returns once more to the mystic’s practice of becoming-active, which is again, as with Behun and Ramey, directly connected to Deleuze and Guattari’s BwO/body of light on the plane of immanence.163 Toward the obscurities of Kierkegaard then, let us go further into Deleuze’s gaseous body, to see how Hughes’ own insight toward a tension between ontology and ethics moves beyond a singular conception of action.

In his second commentary on Bergson, Deleuze repeats the gesture of Bergson’s own meditation upon his self-perception of his body in Matter and Memory.164 As Deleuze’s reflection unfolds, his immersion into a Bergsonian self-perception becomes something of an uncanny reimagining, a thought experiment in relation to his own body, as if this figure, once known to him, now vanishes into the enigmatic lacuna of a protean meta-self:

My body is an image…My eye, my brain, are images, part of my body. How could my brain contain images since it is one image among others? …how could images be in my consciousness since I am myself image, that is, movement? And can I even, at this level, speak of ‘ego’, of eye, of brain and of body? It is rather a gaseous state. Me, my body, are rather a set of molecules and atoms, which are constantly renewed. Can I even speak of atoms?165

For Deleuze’s perception, this gaseous body is the state that precedes the acting body. Moreover, it is a perception of the self that is free from external conditions that might restrain, order, or diminish the power of its indeterminacy. As the condition of possibility itself, the

164 Bergson, Matter and Memory, 17–22.
165 Deleuze, Cinema 1, 58.
image of ‘my body’ is yet to solidify, to fossilise, to become a concrete *something* that bridges the space between my inner self and the world. For Hughes, Deleuze’s curious mode of self-reflection suggests that the body is, ironically, strangely absent from itself, in that it is “not yet the fully constituted body. It is an unconstituted, ‘gaseous’ body” that is “not yet our body.”

With this emphatic allusion to yet another avatar of an indefinable *body of absence* which nonetheless exudes an ephemeral *presence*, Hughes’ notion of the ‘not yet’ restores, rather serendipitously, the Deleuzian-Kierkegaardian intersection of *possibility* through this body that appears as the substance of the *spiritus*, giving rise to the simultaneous senses of an *acting body* that would fluidly collapse the boundary between the ontological and the ethical.

The ‘not yet’ has a definite presence in Deleuze’s oeuvre. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari offer an anecdote that directly invokes its role in relation to the real and the possible. In the sudden encounter with a “frightened face”, the affective shock of its presence penetrates our otherwise serene world, opening out a new possibility for the world itself: neither subject nor object, this other presence exists as an *expression*, an *affective* image of “a possible world; the possibility of a frightening world. This possible world is not real, or not yet, but it exists nonetheless: it is an expressed that exists only in its expression—the face… . The other is a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it and takes shape in a language that gives it a reality.”

In this context, Deleuze’s ‘not yet’ gaseous state in *Cinema 1* evokes just such a world, one that may well be frightening for the freedom it affords. And while this yet-to-be-constituted body—suspended in its very peculiar kind of corporeal absence—has all the traces of the *affection* body that comes before the body of action, it simultaneously covets the *subtle body* of mysticism; in both senses, it is a body which is genuinely open to future possibilities of choice. Now gaseous, Deleuze becomes, *for himself*, a vision of the subtle body, the body without organs, the body of freedom whose possibilities lay immanently before him, undetermined by virtue of the ‘not yet’: is this not, in some sense, also to invoke a faith, by virtue of the absurd? In the encounter with his own body through this ‘Bergsonian’ lens, Deleuze conjures something intangible and opaque, an unknown possibility which is *yet* to be able to be spoken, something which further aligns it with the mercurial nature of the body of light: like cinema does for the body, Deleuze “spreads an ‘experimental night’ or a white space” *over himself*; he works with ‘dancing

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166 Hughes, “Believing in the World,” 76.
167 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 17.
seeds’ and a ‘luminous dust’” to become the possible that cinema already unfurls as it moves between new ontological and ethical configurations.

Hughes’ insight toward the ‘not yet’ gaseous state of Deleuze’s Bergsonian body thus opens toward the possibility of a Kierkegaardian body, one which is not yet a spirit of immanence, not yet an image of authentic selfhood. In this sense, we are no longer in the realm of an acting body which is cut off from, or indifferent to, its inseparable existential attitude. Nor are we any longer in the territory of a purely empirical or naturalist reading of either the Bergsonian body where image=matter=movement=light, Artaud’s BwO, or Spinoza’s question, ‘what can a body do?’ We are entering a stranger territory which, for Ramey, forms the ground of the ‘hermetic’ Deleuze, a territory of secrets and messages, masks and dramaturgs, concealments and disguises, enigmas, mysteries and esoteric wanderings. We are in the territory of images and ideas that rumble beneath the surface of things, rather than those that exist immediately before us, a territory which now allows Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to converge in a properly uncanny sense. In Difference and Repetition, Deleuze discovers an entirely original mode of thought in the tomes of both, a mode he calls the ‘theatre of repetition’, which consciously requires its masks and costumes for the safe passage of a new thought: “Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself.”

As Ramey attests, the mode of repetition, as the mode of disguise, goes beyond the dualism of reality and representation, and in so doing, creates the realm of possibility that once more invokes the ‘not yet’:

> Throughout Difference and Repetition, Deleuze argues that the birth of thought takes place within the uncanny and the unrecognizable, in the sensible and the affective…the unthinkable or indiscernible—that which must but cannot be thought…. In some sense the enigmatic and the uncanny is the condition of each idea… . What matters then, in an idea, is not its ability to represent reality, but the range of experimental possibility it opens onto.

Following Ramey, I suggest that the fragment which grounds Deleuze’s cinema—“Give me a body, then”—harbours this very same sense of secrecy and enigma, this peculiar sense of the ‘not yet’ as it engulfs the threshold within which all liminal modes (such as the uncanny and the absurd) become for the experimental possibility of thought. As just such an enigma—one
which *must* but *cannot* be thought—could the meaning of this message now become a matter of ‘scriptural’ interpretation (and thus, perfectly suited to dramatization)? Perhaps the fragment is something of a cipher, only *appearing* to privilege the bodies of Bergson, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Artaud? What if one were to read it more as a petition of *longing* rather than a resolute or even defiant declaration? What if it denotes *both* at one and the same time? Would it not then appear as a kind of grotesque quandary which conceals and covets ‘a body’ which is ‘not yet’ *given* beneath the body that already exists? Becoming both *religious* and *non-religious* at one and the same time, would it proclaim the death of God with one mouth, while simultaneously revealing God’s immanent restoration with another? For, finally, and without further diversion, it *is* Kierkegaard who, in his *Journals*, makes this morbid request for the possibility of a body in the effort to cure his own peculiar suffering:

> [W]ith respect to being human, what I lack is the animal-attribute. … Suffering frightful anguish, frequently to the point of the impotence of death—my spirit at such a time is strong and I forget all that in the world of ideas. But then I am upbraided for only wanting to be a thinker and for not being like other men…Give me a body, or if you had given me that when I was twenty years old, I would not have been this way. But you are envious, and this is the suffering the more highly endowed person, spiritually-intellectually, has to suffer…

In this manifold address to anguish, the impotence of death, the spirit, the thinker—the sufferer who bears the exile of prejudice *because* of such ‘animal’ absence—and the ironic request for a body, we find all the traces of Kierkegaard’s meditation on despair, a meditation that openly summons the spirit of immanence, which requires the preparation of faith through the body of time and feeling. For Camus, Kierkegaard’s remedy for despair—the leap of faith which entails a “sacrifice of the intellect” —is an act of self-sabotage, nothing short of philosophical and intellectual suicide. Camus thinks that Kierkegaard fails to grasp a more pressing lesson, committing despair to the very same category of escapism that grounds the orthodox religious attitude. Thus, for Camus, there is little difference between Kierkegaard’s longing for a body, and those thinkers Nietzsche condemns as despisers of the

body, those high-priest philosophers who practice the rational movements of the eternal Idea to escape the morally corruptible movements of time’s finite, irrational body of sorrow:

The important thing…is not to be cured, but to live with one’s ailments. Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish and it runs throughout his whole journal. The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition. …how can one fail to read in his works the signs of an almost intentional mutilation of the soul to balance the mutilation accepted in regard to the absurd? It is the leitmotif of the Journal. ‘What I lacked was the animal which also belongs to human destiny… . But give me a body then.’ … ‘Oh!…what I lack, basically, is a body and the physical conditions of existence.’173

Here, the fundamental divide between Kierkegaard’s despair and Camus’s absurd almost certainly summons the divining rod of the habitus of thought: here, it is but a quick step back to the overly simplistic difference between the Christian and the atheist. The possibility of a Christian desire for a body of time, however, or the atheistic desire for a spiritual life, continually requires the practice for a new movement of thought, one that no longer follows the privileging of one category over a subverted other, but moves across, through and between categories. For Kierkegaard, it is the body of both the Christian and the atheist which invokes the spirit of immanence, in the very same way that Deleuze’s cinematic body invokes its legacy of spiritual borrowings; the subtle body, the spiritual automaton, the gaseous body, the BwO, the spirit of sacrifice, the possible of immanence, ‘faith, by virtue of the absurd’. That Camus’s polemic confirms Kierkegaard as the originating source of our primary fragment simply reinforces the precise connection to a Deleuzian cinema of faith in the body of time and feeling.

In this regard, Kierkegaard’s own request—‘Give me a body, then’—is something of a summons to those who would still regard themselves as too much a soul or mind, be they Christian or atheist. Reciprocally, is it also the remarkable inversion of (the Christian’s perception) of the atheist’s dilemma, the shared expression of a universally human despair that would cultivate the myth of immortality and the very concept of eternity: in Kierkegaard, it is time, rather than eternity, that is not quite, or not yet, in his body, and so he is not yet a spirit that would dread despair in the threshold of time and eternity. Cinema, for Deleuze, is precisely the medium which would, as a natural consequence of the absurdity of modernity,


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and the crisis of the action-image which opens into the creation of the time-image, put time back into the body.

This is the extent with which Deleuze’s philosophical reversal, “Give me a body, then” is of a peculiarly Kierkegaardian nature: as a plea of longing, it does not discount the organic bodies of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Artaud or Bergson, but somehow seems to hover within them, in the same way that the possible exists within the real. Does this further exacerbate the tension between philosophical and religious thought? For in calling up the threshold of the spirit, Kierkegaard’s longing for a body troubles not only the Christian-atheist divide, but also the long-held hierarchy between The Thinker and the everyday man. Coming before Dionysian destruction, Kierkegaard’s irony would also rethink the figure of the pious Platonist, that self-appointed superior to the everyday man so loathed by Nietzsche; yet Kierkegaard would seem to ‘play’ with this image of the philosopher, rather than demolish it as Nietzsche does, for he understands the irony of his own position, and how he himself cannot entirely escape its order. While he speaks of himself as the sacred thinker of “melancholy, reflection and piety”, the object of his longing nonetheless challenges this image of a lofty lover of wisdom who wants nothing more than to be done with the body and escape its incarceration, and for whom the body is, in Deleuze words, the “obstacle” for thought. Again Kierkegaard works toward a more liminal position between the everyday man and the high-priest philosopher, his proof for the eternal ‘in man’ ultimately resting upon Socrates’ own existential longing:

Socrates proved the immortality of the soul from the fact that the sickness of the soul (sin) does not consume it as sickness of the body consumes the body. So also we can demonstrate the eternal in man from that fact that despair cannot consume his self, that this is precisely the torment of contradiction in despair. If there were nothing eternal in a man, he could not despair; but if despair could consume his self, there would still be no despair.

With this subtle staging of Socratic immanence, Kierkegaard would, simultaneously and paradoxically, seem to absorb and overturn the Socratic attitude, by moving between an image of Socratic ignorance as a form of infinite resignation, and an image of despair as the

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174 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 129.
175 Kierkegaard, Volume 6: Autobiographical Part Two 1848-1855, 320.
176 Deleuze, Cinema 2, 189.
ground of the spirit of immanence. In this reconfiguration, if “man is regarded as soul” in traditional Christian thought, the hierarchy that would enthrone the philosopher-Christian as the archetype of soul, thus demoting the natural-everyday man as archetype of body, also becomes displaced with Kierkegaard’s desire; toward the attainment of spirit, the everyday-body must learn to make the movements of the infinite, while the thinker-soul must learn to make the movements of the finite. Once more, the lack that Kierkegaard feels comes through keenly; already practicing the movements of eternity, he longs to learn the movements of time, to put time back into his body, so that he might become a spirit. “Give me a body then” is Kierkegaard’s own desire to reconcile himself to the body of absence, which Deleuze reciprocates as the great lesson of cinema for our self-absence: to be on the precipice of the gaseous body, the subtle body, the BwO, to become a centre of indetermination…this is the body that cinema automatically prepares for thought.

As Hughes suggests, *Cinema 2* never completely reveals “how we get from a state of permanent crisis back to the sphere of action” through a cinema of faith, much less, might we add, how we might locate the pedagogical crossing between a Kierkegaardian body and a cinema of faith: why does Deleuze leave us to grope through the lacunas and landmines of the spiritual wasteland he prepares, which absolutely exceeds the singularity of neo-realism’s despairing man? “For his part,” Deleuze writes,

> Rohmer takes up the Kierkegaardian stages ‘on the path of life’: the aesthetic stage in *La Collectionneuse*, the ethical stage in *Beau marriage*, for example, and the religious stage in *My Night at Maud’s*…. In Dreyer, in Bresson, and in Rohmer, in three different ways, this is a cinema of the spirit which does not fail to be more concrete, more fascinating and more amusing than any other (cf. Dreyer’s comic aspect).

Here, with Bresson, Dreyer and Rohmer, would Deleuze invoke the space between the movement-image and the time-image as the threshold of the absurd—it’s dual tragic and comical irony, its magnetism for burlesquing the serious spiritual posture—so as to locate this *cinema of the spirit* that restores Kierkegaard? We must continue to attempt to grasp the Kierkegaardian spirit in the way Deleuze does; not as tomes of *logic* but as plays of affect;

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178 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 79.
179 Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 146.
180 Hughes, “Believing in the World,” 86.
181 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 177–78.
not as the rational exposition of ideas but as their sophisticated dramatization; as the burlesquing of faith through the body of gesture, shock and sudden revelation, rather than its impotent justification; as the craft of the sacred fool who, like the madman-jester, and like the theatrical body of burlesque, lives on as the herald of freedom and truth.182

Ultimately, if there is any chance of glimpsing Kierkegaard as Punchinello dramaturg, we must remove him from the realm of the serious that he is so often left to languish in,183 for we are trying to look through Deleuzé’s eyes, and not, as Bazin would say, through “the spiritual dust and grime” of our own,184 and we need a secure, unbiased grasp of the Kierkegaardian spirit to do so, the spirit of quietude and integrity who lives into the freedom of true choice, whose ethos affirms such immanent forces as movement, time, possibility, becoming, intensity, and imagination, and who believes in the merits of a burlesque method of thought. As contemporary film-philosophy already acknowledges, if these various aspects have a deep resonance with Deleuze, both in and beyond the cinema books, it is hardly co-incidental, however absent, antithetical or under-appreciated it appears to remain in broader philosophical circles.185 Following the pathway established by those scholars already openly invested in the more serious Kierkegaardian pulse of a Deleuzian cinema of faith,186 I further suggest that this existential grounding requires the balance of the absurd’s more theatrical, burlesque forces of gesture, jest, irony, and humour; through this more comprehensive circuit, we might glimpse the possibility of a more complete cinema of the absurd, wherein Deleuze’s immanent conversion of faith becomes the mask that would, ironically and paradoxically, perform the spirit of Kierkegaard himself. To this, let us recall the foundation for thinking the unthought: it is no longer the existence or non-existence of God that matters, but the possibilities of life that become available when one invokes the full thrust of creative imagination and passion, thus allowing us to move beyond a purely serious conception of the spiritual attitude and into the breach of the absurd proper.

183 John Lippitt, Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard’s Thought (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 1.
185 Kleinherenbrink, “Art as Authentic Life,” 98–99, 104; Baugh, “Private thinkers, Untimely Thoughts,” 314.
Toward this cinematic burlesquing of the spirit then, let us trace the Kierkegaardian-Nietzschean theatre of repetition in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, to finally see how such a theatre performs beneath the threshold of Deleuze’s cinema books. As we go, the philosophical inversion “Give me a body, then” will continue to perform its incarnations of the absurd, as if in its own protean, *gaseous* state of possibility.

**Kierkegaard and Nietzsche: Leaping and Dancing in the Theatre of Repetition**

Is it a matter of leaping, as Kierkegaard believes? Or is it rather a matter of dancing, as Nietzsche thinks? …Is the movement in the sphere of the mind, or in the entrails of the earth which knows neither God nor self?

—Gilles Deleuze

A man’s *ethos* is his *daimon*.

—Heraclitus

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze takes up the remarkable difference between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard’s philosophies of repetition through the grounding practice of dramaturgy that masks their philosophies of existence. Repetition here means precisely *not* what it presupposes etymologically: reimagining the Latin *repetere* (*re-* back, *petere-* seek), repetition is no longer the reflection, echo, mirror, mirage or copy of an unchanging, original essence. As Deleuze says, “Reflections and echoes, doubles and souls do not belong to the domain of semblance or equivalence”. Repetition is not another term for the “representation” which languishes within the metaphysics of presence. Rather, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard “make something new of repetition itself”, opposing it to all forms of generality (laws of nature, morality, habit and memory), and charging it with the theatrical atmosphere of irony, satire, lyricism and humour that would parry with the most serious of philosophical adversaries: the irresolvable paradox between the meaningfulness and absurdity of existence in the world of time and feeling, and the ethos of *a spirit of immanence* that would

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188 Heraclitus quoted in Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms*; see *ethos*, 66.
189 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1.
190 Ibid., 6–7.
challenge and even overcome the forces of nihilism. In this new mode of repetition, time is no longer the image of eternity, nor is the body the image of the soul. In kind, mortal feeling is no longer the nemesis of divine thought, with the forgetting or finding of God and the self becoming the measure of authenticity: in repetition, what one “is” in this world now becomes the work of a spirit that would act for itself if only it could first think for itself.

Framing both forms of repetition as forces that would act on thought by burlesquing the traditional meaning of representation, Deleuze finds striking differences between the two. In Nietzsche, repetition is the spirit of an ecstatic Dionysian willing of the eternal return, “the amor fati of metamorphosis”192 which overcomes the absurdity of existence; in Kierkegaard, it is the meditative act of repeating, where, as we have seen, all that one surrenders to God (love, life, the intellect) is returned through faith, by virtue of the absurd. Where Nietzsche grounds “the repetition of eternal return on both the death of God and the dissolution of the self”, Kierkegaard “dreams of an alliance between a God and a self rediscovered.”193 In each instance, writes Ramey, both seek to animate a mode of thought which becomes equal to “the inhuman events that befall it”,194 one whose potent force is oriented toward the future. By going beyond representation, by opposing the laws of nature, morality, habit, and memory, and as the act of the ethos of the spirit, repetition creates a new relation between the future’s two pathways of eternity and death: while Kierkegaard will make repetition the task of freedom and true choice in this life through the contemplation and confrontation with despair’s undying presence (death’s deathlessness), Nietzsche’s eternal return unleashes its macabre game of loss and salvation, annihilation and rebirth, making repetition the freedom of a euphoric will which creates and destroys its life over and over again.195 Where one’s repetition occurs only once, the other repeats infinitely, and in The Logic of Sense, Deleuze crystallises this essential difference:

The Nietzschean repetition has nothing to do with the Kierkegaardian repetition; or, more generally, repetition in the eternal return has nothing to do with the Christian repetition. For what the Christian repetition brings back, it brings back once, and only once: the wealth of Job and the child of Abraham, the resurrected body and the recovered self. There is a

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192 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 129.
193 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 11.
194 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 129.
195 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 6.
difference in nature between what returns “once and for all” and what returns for each and every time, or for an infinite number of times. ¹⁹⁶

Is this formulation of repetition not already the prelude for Deleuze’s own existential credo in *Cinema 2*, whereby his constant appeal for a *restoration* of faith in the body of time and feeling, a restoration aimed toward the future, takes on the conceptual contours of a spirit of repetition?

Both repetition and restoration invoke a faith in the finite world, giving us another sense for thinking the metamorphosis of the fragment “Give me a body then”, its meaning now going beyond Ficino’s *spiritus*, Artaud’s BwO and Bergson’s gaseous body, without exorcising or dispensing with them, and now sliding between repeating and returning. Deleuze desires the power of a *true cinema* to restore faith in the body and the world, in love and life, to restore reason itself, by virtue of the absurd, “Whether we are Christians or atheists…”¹⁹⁷ … Is it to be the repetition of Kierkegaard’s *once and for all*, or the eternal return of Nietzsche’s *infinite number of times*? When Deleuze writes on the surrealist cinema of Luis Buñuel, it is precisely to demonstrate how cinema collapses the boundary between these two creative forms of repetition for the future, against the more querulous presence of a “bad” or simplistic form of repetition of the past:

[¹]n Buñuel…entropy was replaced by the cycle or the eternal return. Now, the eternal return failed to be as catastrophic as entropy, just as the cycle failed to be as degrading in all its parts, but none the less they extract a spiritual power of repetition, which poses in a new way the question of a possible salvation. The good man, the saintly man, are imprisoned in the cycle, no less than the thug and the evildoer. But is not repetition capable of breaking out of its own cycle and of ‘leaping’ beyond good and evil? It is repetition which ruins and degrades us, but it is repetition which can save us and allow us to escape from the other repetition. Kierkegaard had already opposed a fettering, degrading repetition of the past to a repetition of faith, directed towards the future, which restored everything to us in a power which was not that of the Good but of the absurd…in *The Exterminating Angel*, the law of bad repetition keeps the guests in the room whose boundaries cannot be crossed, while good repetition seems to abolish the limits and open them on to the world. …The repetition of the past is possible materially, but spiritually impossible, in the name of Time: on the contrary, the

¹⁹⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 300.
¹⁹⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 172.
repetition of faith, directed toward the future, seems to be materially impossible, but spiritually possible, because it consists in beginning everything again, in ascending the path which is imprisoned by the cycle, by virtue of a creative instant of time. Are there thus two repetitions which confront each other, like a death impulse and a life impulse? Buñuel leaves us in a state of the greatest uncertainty, beginning with the distinction or the confusion of two repetitions.¹⁹⁸

This correlation between a philosophy of repetition and a cinema of restoration is not even the most provocative aspect of Deleuze’s ruminations here. In securing this first crossing between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Deleuze discovers another “thought-cinema-body” link, one which holds the key to grasping Deleuze’s cinema of faith as a cinema of the absurd, one which harbours a conception of spirituality which exceeds spirituality’s traditionally serious image. For Deleuze, the affective reach of philosophy’s pedagogical purpose—its possibility to affect change in the world—needs to come through a mode of communication that would confront the ascetic charade of the ‘false’ thinker: for both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, the antithesis of an authentic life is precisely this crude play of poses and egos. Through Deleuze, we see that the remedy for such imposture becomes, ironically and appropriately, a matter of engaging the practice of a timeless theatre, one whose irony is both tragic and comic, and penetrates the serious drama of life via the method of burlesque.

Requiring a mode which would withstand and even revel in the dire excess of their themes—God, existence, morality, truth, ignorance—both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard create the ideal tragi-comedy setting within which the drama of existence plays itself out, inventing “an incredible equivalent of theatre within philosophy, thereby founding simultaneously this theatre of the future and a new philosophy.”¹⁹⁹ In Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, it becomes a matter of miming the mimicker, of creating new masks and disguises, messengers and secrets, where the truth is created against the tricksy façade of false knowledge. In this,

¹⁹⁸ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 131–32. See *The Exterminating Angel*, dir. Luis Buñuel (1962; Richmond, VIC: Madman Entertainment, 1991), DVD.
Deleuze finds “a Testament as well as a Theatre”, a philosophy conceived “entirely for the stage,” whose knights and heroes perform the dark humour and painful irony of the most serious existence.\textsuperscript{200} “O you roguish fools,” rages Zarathustra, “all of you, you jesters! …you strange higher men, how well I like you now since you have become gay again. …a little brave nonsense, some divine service and ass festival, some old gay fool of a Zarathustra, a roaring wind that blows your souls bright.”\textsuperscript{201} From the pen of the dramaturg rather than the ascetic intellectual, comes not merely a philosophy but a theatre of repetition, where storytellers and characters perform their parts, communicating the vast minutiae of morality’s quandaries through dynamic gestures, cautionary tales, songs, riddles, postures, parables, acrobatics, dances, poetry, and proclamations. “It happened that a fire broke out backstage in a theatre,” writes Kierkegaard, “The clown came out to inform the public. They thought it was just a jest and applauded. He repeated his warning, they shouted even louder. So I think the world will come to an end amid general applause from all the wits who believe that it is a joke.”\textsuperscript{202}

For Deleuze, this is a true theatre whose satire would bear witness to the false charade of ‘real life,’ one which leaps in tune with Mozart’s music (Kierkegaard), and dances to the unleashed ritornellos of the earth (Nietzsche).\textsuperscript{203} Opposing the cool rhetorician of logical persuasion, the playwright of repetition reciprocates the pathos intrinsic to the circumstance through messengers who would illuminate those absurd crossings between the self, God, and the world: in Kierkegaard’s 	extit{Fear and Trembling}, the sacred fool whispers his truth to himself (God is found!); in Nietzsche’s 	extit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, the madman screams it to the world (God is dead!).

For Deleuze, Kierkegaard is “a thinker who lives the problem of masks, who experiences the inner emptiness of masks and seeks to fill it” through the catharsis of his “theatre of humour and of faith”, where the existential drama of leaping plays out.\textsuperscript{204} Here, leaping is given as an

\textsuperscript{200} Deleuze, 	extit{Difference and Repetition}, 5, 9, 10.
\textsuperscript{201} Nietzsche, “The Ass Festival,” in 	extit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra}, 316–17.
\textsuperscript{204} Deleuze, 	extit{Difference and Repetition}, 8–9.
inward, imperceptible movement, which “opposes spiritual movement [with] logical movement”, where enlightenment’s ‘truth’ (knowledge) is overwhelmed by passion (faith).\textsuperscript{205} For Nietzsche, repetition is still “a matter of filling the inner emptiness of masks within a theatrical space”,\textsuperscript{206} though now it is in the form of a willing spirit: “The eternal return says: whatever you will, will it in such a manner that you also will its eternal return.”\textsuperscript{207} Here, repetition becomes the “theatre of unbelief”, with Zarathustra’s “irony and black humour” becoming at times “a comic opera about terrible things”, whose ecstatic, self-annihilating movements of Dionysian dancing “already” participate in Artaud’s modern theatre of cruelty.\textsuperscript{208} While the joke of Christian leaping resides quietly within the solitude of a self yet to come, the laughter of anti-theological dancing rejoices wildly in the bellow and ecstasy of a true spirit of freedom.

“Theatre is real movement”,\textsuperscript{209} declares Deleuze, and so the real movement of thought must be grasped through those distinct movements peculiar to repetition’s drama, and one must be careful not to confuse them (“leaping is not dancing”).\textsuperscript{210} Both philosophies seek “to put metaphysics in motion, in action”, to create an affective force within the philosophical work that affects or shocks thought directly.\textsuperscript{211} Through this creation of a new physical theatre for thought, Deleuze grasps their untimely significance: “it is a question of making movement itself a work…of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. This is the idea of a man of the theatre, the idea of a director before his time.”\textsuperscript{212} This is a philosophy which thinks like the body acts, and which performs the waves, vibrations, migrations, thresholds and intensities of Spinoza’s ethics, Artaud’s body without organs, and Bergsonian duration. One does not simply think the leap or the dance; one feels it as a kind of kinaesthetic reciprocity through the passion of its possibilities: like the infinite movements in cinema’s gestic bodies—the gest being “the essence of theatre”\textsuperscript{213}—it is a shock to thought, as Deleuze says in Cinema 2.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 11.
\item Ibid., 9.
\item Ibid., 7.
\item Ibid., 9–11.
\item Ibid., 10.
\item Deleuze, \textit{Nietzsche and Philosophy}, 37.
\item Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 8.
\item Ibid.
\item Deleuze, \textit{Cinema 2}, 192.
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Beneath the tragic and comical irony of storytelling, both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard script a possibility for existence which would be free from both the tyranny of melancholic absurdity and the traditional image of the religious body of sorrow: this is their common ground. It is precisely the art of theatre which allows philosophical repetition to prepare the possibility for a metamorphosis of thought, passing beneath or beyond the radar of the rational, “concealing ideas within animals, pseudonyms, fables, and myths.”

Through Deleuze, we understand that the philosophical theatre of repetition becomes the art of disguise *par excellence*: appearing as illuminati, fools and madmen come *leaping* and *dancing* in the hope that such movements might inspire the forceful (re)awakening of our own original, creative thought amidst a great pedagogy of feeling; through the pathos of movement, we might learn to grasp what we have forgotten to become, learn to harness what exists quietly and dreadfully beneath the suffocating layers of our own emperor’s new clothes, learn to become absurd in the most *theatrical*, rather than *philosophical*, sense.

This, Deleuze seems to say, is the power of cinema, to restore the possibility of repetition *through* the creation of a body of immanence which would outstrip the false theatre and bad cinema of reality. In this sense, theatre itself—this spiritual theatre of the absurd—is the crossing between the philosophical pursuit for faith, and the Deleuzian cinema of faith. If the ethos and pathos of a theatre of repetition prophecies a theatre, philosophy, and cinema of *the future*, it is through this stable of heroes, knights, fools and madmen, figures who may only exist as distant objects of scientific enquiry in the comparatively conservative mode of enlightened ‘knowledge’. Deleuze thus suggests that however significant the essential message of a philosophy of objective reason, it may never achieve quite the same revelatory impact as this theatrical absurd that performs the world it creates. In kind, could we followingly suggest that a cinema of faith—of the absurd, of repetition as restoration—cannot procure its remedy through a wholly *serious* cinema of tragic irony (such as neo-realism) alone, without the existential clown? With Paolo Santarcangeli, we could say,

> Here then, is the utility, the justification of the clown, of the madman, of the madman who clowns, all institutionally exempt from punishment, a *poenis soluti*. “The social function of the satire of clowns who jeeringly accompanied conquerors and kings is undeniable;” remarked Roger Caillois. And vice versa all dictatorships, especially the stupidest ones, had at

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their head at the beginning, leaders who did not know how to laugh at themselves; moral, religious and spiritual dictatorships included. For the comic view of the world frees man of the terrifying presence of the “demonic,” of religio, the bonds connecting his with the divine, and makes him forget the perils, the weight, the severity of existence.215

Here, we might immediately recall Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940), which not only bears witness to, but burlesques the sheer madness of the world made by men.216 Historically, this has ever been the role of the artistic madman and the sacred fool. Across the spectrum of the arts, the figure of the clown attests to a world gone mad with the imposture of representation, and humanity’s own self-righteous pomp and circumstance. Gazing deeply into the soul of its culture to conspire with its demonic delirium, it is the clown who uses his body to radically undermine the serious nature of absurdity, becoming all manner of grotesque hybrid forms, becoming part-human part-vegetable, monster, god, animal, and/or machine. This is the burlesque body of Chaplin, of Harold Lloyd, of Buster Keaton, all tricksy “heralds of truth”, architects of the free spirit, inventors of new forms of body-satire who conjure new links between the spirit of the self and the world: crafting the laughter of the existential shock through the metamorphic properties of the plastic, theatrical body, the slapstick clown illuminates all manner of cautionary fates, impossible predicaments, and unbearable circumstances proper to the absurd machine world of modernity.217 These are the figures who are sired from the very same ancestry that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche come. As Santarcangeli writes, however prolific its incarnation, the clown ultimately performs the role of harlequin sentry who would defend, counsel, puppeteer and purge the dire diseases of the soul through the force of laughter:

The clown…is by turns creator and destroyer, a strange being who grants and who refuses, duper and duped according to the situation. …He knows neither Good nor Evil, or pretends not to know them; he removes himself from the realm of both and declines all responsibility for either one or the other. But beneath his apparent madness it is the Good which he seeks. …His acts impart a new vigour to life. …Divine juggler! We laugh at him, but he mocks us. For what happens to him happens to us. …if he causes laughter and is a source of liberation and criticism, he does not necessarily take part in the laughter and his attitude is frequently


one of disturbing sadness. For he is conscious of the responsibility of the role he plays which is a cause of social conflict. …there are only two means of overcoming the tragic: religion and irony. …laughter is a basically anti-religious manifestation. Clown, jester, joker, fool, trickster…boffon, jongleur, arlequin…an entire repertory of titles, significant, suggestive and as varied as the costumes proper to the hundred manifestations of the same hero. 218

As dramaturgs of religion and irony, both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard invoke the mettle of this ancient anti-hero, their narrators and actors of repetition becoming just such sacred fools who create the truth: as Deleuze says, while Nietzsche’s Zarathustra will create a “thought beyond good and evil”, Kierkegaard’s knight performs an otherwise unthinkable “suspension of ethics”. 219 As mime, acrobat and tight-rope walker, as trickster, fool and madman, these are the messengers of a new kind of truth-seeking who would shatter what Deleuze will call philosophy’s “false” theatre of representation, 220 allowing him to advance his own cinema of restoration.

**Conclusion: From Humour to Faith**

Humour is the last stage of existential inwardness before faith. …Humour is not faith but comes before faith—it is not after faith or a development of faith.

—Søren Kierkegaard 221

To contemplate a cinematic restoration of faith as deeply ironic in both the tragic and the comical sense…to discover a cinema that is “a Testament and a Theatre”…to grasp the infinite possibilities of the body as the gestural, jesting doer of truth rather than purely ascetic sayer of doctrine or spiritually-paralysed seer of despair…with so many turns through a Deleuzian cinema—of the body, of the spirit, of modes of existence, of sacred fools and madmen—does a spirituality of the cinematic body exist beyond a strictly serious asceticism, somewhere between the seriousness and the nonsense of the absurd, because of its pedagogical possibilities?

The body which Deleuze prepares for thought through the time-images of neo-realism—a body bereft of belief yet simultaneously charged with the power to restore belief—is nothing

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220 Ibid., 10.
if not the serious incantation of absurdity’s tragic irony, its role given to bear witness to a life of banality and despair, a life which paradoxically takes the absurdity of its existence with the utmost seriousness. Yet Deleuze would also prepare for thought the movement-image bodies of surrealism, slapstick, and expressionism, all forms whose role it is to radically undermine the serious, the ascetic, the faithful, the ‘real’. Can Deleuze’s credo only be realised in the constant passage between movement-bodies of comical irony and time-bodies of tragic irony? Without the theatre of repetition, without Kierkegaard’s sacred fool who would joust with Nietzsche’s madman, without the affective forces of leaping and dancing, how are we to properly grasp the ironic nature of our own life beyond the tragic? Without the clown, how are we to practice the movements of faith, by virtue of the absurd?

For Kierkegaard, it is humour that will move us into the possibility of faith and truth, and out from beneath the mask of the false knight, his most satirical castings reserved for his own ineptitude to leap: “Irony and humour reflect also upon themselves, and therefore belong within the sphere of infinite resignation…The last movement, the paradoxical movement of faith, I cannot make…in spite of the fact that I would do it more than gladly.”223 The irony of Kierkegaard’s own life—his infinite resignation to love God without leaping while desiring nonetheless to become the leaping spirit—ultimately invites an image of the tragic comic. This is not lost on Deleuze, who would see Kierkegaard’s self-conscious sacred fool of religious faith strung up amidst so much pathos:

Kierkegaard… entrusted this supreme repetition, repetition as a category of the future, to faith. …However, there is an adventure of faith, according to which one is always the clown of one’s own faith, the comedian of one’s ideal. For faith has its own Cogito which in turns conditions the sentiment of grace, like an interior light. …the believer does not lead his life only as a tragic sinner in so far as he is deprived of the condition, but as a comedian and clown, a simulacrum of himself in so far as he is doubled in the condition. Two believers cannot observe each other without laughing. Grace excludes no less when it is given than when it is lacking. Indeed, Kierkegaard said he was a poet of the faith rather than a knight—in short, a ‘humorist’. …How could faith not be its own habit and its own reminiscence, and

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223 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 62.
how could…a repetition which, paradoxically, takes place once and for all—not be comical?\textsuperscript{224}

Thus, through the many turns we have made, it is not merely the credo of faith, nor the peculiar passion that creates Kierkegaard’s leap, that Deleuze would salvage and transform for his own philosophy of restoration in the cinema books, but the complexity of irony as it relates to faith and the body. In Cinema 2, the strange allusion to the figure of the sacred fool now takes on a wholly different meaning: “We need an ethic or a faith, which makes fools laugh: it is not a need to believe in something else, but a need to believe in this world, of which fools are a part.”\textsuperscript{225} This, for me, is Deleuze’s most provocative spiritual landmine, one that presents the Kierkegaardian spirit in a properly absurd light. For Kierkegaard, the lack of a body is his great ironic pose. For Deleuze, it is precisely this lacuna that cinema not only bears witness to, but seeks to restore through its own theatre of repetition, through the body of burlesque, a body which is beyond representation, and the essence of the true artist that Deleuze reveres: “Metamorphosis of the true. What the artist is, is creator of truth, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created. There is no other truth than the creation of the New…”\textsuperscript{226} If we are indeed absent from ourselves, perhaps the remedy resides in Deleuze’s ensemble of orators of the body, which harbours, rather than exorcises, Kierkegaard’s spirit of immanence. The subtle way out invites us to live into a new spirituality for the future, through a body whose despair is the foundation for its creation, through faith, by virtue of the absurd. “Give me a body then…”

\textsuperscript{224} Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 95.
\textsuperscript{225} Deleuze, \textit{Cinema 2}, 173.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 146–47.
Conclusion: Spiritual Complexity

In conclusion, we might ask, with Cobussen, “Where has this wandering, this groping and erring taken us?” Through musical meanings and cinematic human figures, have the liminal modes revealed a new significance for spirituality? Have they revealed new definitions, new modes of existence, for an age that is itself wandering, groping and erring amidst the unsettling displacements of our own post-secular, post-religious time? Have they provided an equally critical and poetic engagement with Deleuze’s call for a new kind of faith that he believes to be immanent to cinema, a faith that rethinks the transcendental, otherworldly kind that has tended to remain, throughout history, the province of music?

From a musical perspective, we can say, with Cobussen, that “spirituality escapes any presentation within logocentrism”: like music, spirituality is “transcendent to this way of thinking, transcendent to presentation.” In this sense, music and spirituality defy the act of definition itself. Music is not a cipher for universal, divine messages, but a temporal conduit through which the spiritual emerges as “immanent, singular and not otherworldly”:

...spirituality does not precede music; it is through music (and of course many other evocations) that we encounter the spiritual... A spiritual existence is therefore always mediated and thus never immediate. Spirituality is thus no stable concept, an invariable (and with that a definable) idea; spirituality happens, it happens each time differently and is therefore in a constant process of becoming, of (trans)formation. Spirituality is a movement.

The core concepts of movement, transformation and mediation remain significant, for music exists as a force that requires the medium of the sensible—the body—for it to sound, to be heard and felt, while also being the catalyst for movements and transformations in thought itself: for music to “be” spiritual, it need not “belong” to the site of the eternal soul, to religion, to Christianity, or to other organisations or institutes that create ambiguous crossings between terms such as unity, oneness, order, belonging, universality, equality, homogeneity, sameness and conformity. Recognising the further irony of naming this movement that is paradoxically beyond language, Cobussen calls the musical encounter a para-spirituality,

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1 Cobussen, Thresholds, 143.
2 Ibid., 145.
3 Ibid., 146.
with ‘para’ being “the dangerous prefix defying the rules of identity, stability, and centricity”. In a time defined arbitrarily as both post-religious and post-secular—thus a time moving ambivalently between a defiance to, and a reassertion of, the rules of identity, stability and centricity—Cobussen’s work offers a pathway that leaves the freedom and openness of music’s spirituality intact; spirituality “can never be defined for once and for all…this way is twisted and not very well specified…” In this sense, Cobussen’s thresholds allow us to reimagine our own participation with music’s aura of mystery beyond a moralising orthodoxy that has traditionally bound the territory of spirituality to anthropocentric, logocentric thought.

Following Cobussen, we might further suggest that this process of mediation allows us to recognise that music’s complicated relation with identity, stability and centricity necessarily entails a confrontation with what it means to be human. Provocatively, the cinematic human figure, with its own processes of mediation, its own fluid metamorphoses of identity, and its own complicated relation with spirituality presents a rather peculiar reciprocity with music’s para nature, opening out the question of where the spiritual resides, and upon which planes of existence. Like musical meaning, the cinematic human figure is not only innately liminal, but liminal in a plural sense, its own aura of mystery, like music’s, summoning diverse theories of identity that move between such polarities as body and soul, thought and feeling, human and cosmos, time and eternity, life and death: Jankélévitch’s imprecise soul in the flux of becoming, Cholodenko’s anti-Platonic uncanny spectre, Bazin’s luminous spirit, Morin’s mythical double, Ficino’s musical-mystical subtle body (the body of light), Nietzsche’s Dionysian self-forgetting spirit of the earth and the night, Kierkegaard’s spirit of the absurd, Deleuze’s cinematic body of immanence. Correspondingly, each figure animates an affective, cosmological threshold intrinsic to its bond between human identity and faith, revealing a certain kinship between questions of belonging and solitude, the problem of time (of which death is foundational), the imagination’s powers of creation, and those actual and symbolic forces of the universe with which cosmic communion is realised: from the pre-Christian archaic darkness of Hades and the Christian luminous space between heaven and earth, to the silent abyss between the “modern” self and the world of humans, such thresholds compel us to think the plurality of ways in which the bounds of human ontology are challenged, and

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4 Cobussen, Thresholds, 147.
5 Ibid., 146.
how the simultaneous desire to merge with both nature and the divine necessarily entails a movement beyond the either/or predicament that continues to haunt the future of belief.

This generative ensemble of para-spiritual figures and spaces has emerged from the language and methodology implicit to the concept of liminality itself: in this respect, I hope to have shown the ways in which the intersecting modes of the ineffable, the uncanny, utopian desire and absurd feeling, and their respective components of existential ambiguity, paradox and irony, offer an extraordinarily rich and complex foundation for revitalising those perennial, irresolvable problems of existence that art seeks communion with. In moving through these modes, such complexity has taken the relation between faith, musical meaning and the cinematic human figure into much stranger, and at times controversial, places than the discrete paradigms of musicology, film theory and film music studies have traditionally accommodated. Animating crossings between archaic, Platonic, Christian and atheistic beliefs, the modes themselves necessarily intervene with the false certitude that an either/or system imposes and preserves, creating new possibilities for thinking the bond between human identity and faith, possibilities that I believe respond dynamically and responsibly to the incertitude of our own post-religious and post-secular time.

Ultimately, a thinking in thresholds allows us to approach the intersecting theories of musicology and film studies with a firm grasp of the stakes involved in forging a theory of spiritual complexity, a theory that pursues the significance of art in relation to thought and life: however counter-intuitive, alien or undesirable, spiritual complexity recognises otherwise unthinkable thresholds that move indeterminately between thought and feeling, between the Platonist and the Nietzschean, between the Christian and atheist, between logos and mythos, between a belief in time and a belief in eternity. Toward such complexity, the modes give us a language for engaging critically and creatively, even theatrically, as Deleuze suggests, with those ontological and ethical quandaries regarding our existence, with what we cannot know of death, and what may yet become possible in life, without reducing the act of theorising itself to a purely logical, “rigidly rationalistic” process.6 In Pure Immanence, Deleuze writes:

6 Ramey, The Hermetic Deleuze, 222.
The philosopher of the future is the explorer of ancient worlds, of peaks and caves, who creates only inasmuch as he recalls something that has been essentially forgotten. That something, according to Nietzsche, is the unity of life and thought. It is a complex unity; one step for life, one step for thought. Modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living. Life activates thought, and thought in turn affirms life.7

In directly pursuing how liminal philosophies of thought also connect to spiritual theories of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure, I have tried to emphasise the extent to which complexity involves not only a reckoning with the belief in eternity, but a recognition of spirituality immersed in the qualitative feeling of time, which remains beyond logical, quantitative knowledge. While a Bergsonian current flows through these ideas, so too does Morin’s notion of “true rationality”, where, like Deleuze’s own affirmations, the very concept of “thought” moves beyond the traditional category of reason. More collectively still, and however discrete their anthropological, philosophical, theological and/or artistic pursuits, from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche, Morin to Deleuze, Jankélévitch to Cobussen, one mode of existence—of thought—is consistently challenged, the one which refuses complexity through the privileging of rationalism—the pious, ascetic thinker, as Deleuze calls the philosopher, Kierkegaard’s false knight of infinite resignation, Tarkovsky’s spiritually impotent modern man of capitalist consumerism—while other more potent identities are offered as alternatives, all of which are equally available and possible to thought when one embraces not only the incertitude of existence through paradox and ambiguity, but the equally dynamic forces of joy, innocence, irony and the shifting plurality of metamorphosis. Among these are Morin’s thinker-feeler-madman-player-doer, Nietzsche’s hermit, Cobussen’s atopian wandering mystic, Kierkegaard’s true knight of faith, Deleuze’s artist-thinker who lives into a burlesque spirit of immanence: in the search for what Ramey calls “the future of belief”, these are figures who might certainly offer new possibilities for future modes of faith, particularly if faith is now entrusted not only to the composer and the filmmaker, but also to the dramaturge philosopher that captivates Deleuze.

Ramey is “convinced that philosophy, within and beyond Deleuze, has an eschatological dimension in that it calls for new concrete syntheses of thought and life, in the midst of a continuing crisis over the nature and future of secular, modern, and post-Enlightenment

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To this, I wonder if this eschatological dimension is already active when thought and life converge in the liminal modes of musical meaning and the cinematic human figure. Toward such spiritual complexity, I hope to have begun a dialogue which advocates a genuine sense of diversity amidst liminalist music and film theories, which affirms that such theories offer sophisticated negotiations with the “post-secular turn” that philosophy is currently immersed in, and which establishes the music-cinema encounter as an open threshold for creatively reimagining the future of belief itself.

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8 Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze*, 222.
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