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A State of Method

Unknowing

Celia Morgan

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2014.
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ABSTRACT

Within the assertive movements of inquiry and creation there dwells a quiet void of unknowing. Out of this abyss of infinite expansion the creative gesture is exhaled. Tracing a chaotic profusion of instances, images and inferences, this thesis is an exploratory delve into the active state of unknowing resident within the creative gesture. It is suggested that the non-discriminating and ubiquitous presence of unknowing conditions a method of doing and a mode of being that together become a state of method of unknowing. This is suggested not through description but by arousal, through the form of the thesis. For commensurate with the subject, the thesis is presented not so much as a document, but as an activity: a formal emulation of the postulate that invites an encounter with this state of method of unknowing. A way is opened into the nebulous territories of the unknown but arrival at any understanding is paradoxically dependent on the absence of a destination. The trajectory is therefore not, and must not be, conclusive.

Divided into three parts, the thesis begins with a general appraisal of concepts and ideas which all manifest a tendency towards unknowing. Frequently this is by housing at their core some inscrutable and mysterious unknown element. This element is more often than not the very essence of the idea itself. These ideas or occurrences span nearly two and a half millennia of recorded thought in quite diverse and not necessarily related fields. The second part focusses on how the active principle of unknowing may reveal itself through methods of meaning making. The main vehicles of explication are those of poetics and hermeneutics. This is chiefly for reasons of attempting to demonstrate through the actual means employed, and in the case of a thesis, this is language. The third part introduces the archetypal image of a ruin as an aesthetic articulation of the state of method. The ruin is conceived of as an entity in a state of perpetual becoming and which, by means of this metaphysical topography, unveils the performing dynamics of unknowing as a state of method.
Prologue

[Interlocuting]

RECEPTIONIST
A PIECE OF ROCK IN ALLEGORY

(Scene)
A very large and ornate empty mirror frame is propped against a crumbling column just left of centre stage. The backdrop is a fantastic affair of distant peaks, including the ominous glow of a volcanic caldera, atmospheric cumulus formations and mysteriously lit water surfaces with the occasional tumbling cascade. Receptionist is bent down and forward slightly and peers through the frame towards the audience. A piece of rock in allegory is reclining on the floor of a dinghy in front of the frame, the dinghy being loosely moored to it. The stage appears to be a slightly swampy plain of grasses and stone mounds. No obvious water bodies in sight, only in the distant shimmer from the backdrop.

RECEPTIONIST: They had set out, we thought to sail but no flag was flown, no sail in the rigging. Nothing rigged. They were lost.
A PIECE OF ROCK IN ALLEGORY: The fine salt of the high seas corrosive but tasty.
R: Through the misty yawning doubts of chaotic profusion from which we begin.
A.P.O.R.I.A: Beginning with A, as I do.
R. A tempting trail you lead, but I shall blaze my own I shall, I do. You of course are welcome, as long as you follow. Follow in the right way...or else you'll be lost.
R: So, after setting sail, that being where we began, departure essential, destination also but without fixing it exact, they set off, as we said. The first veil aside revealed the real, the mask of what they appeared to be doing and that appearance was all they had so hoisting the veil they caught the wind, violent winds of philosophising and along that infinite shore towards the evanescent horizon they chartered the unknown and called it a map. Unsure of the vessel and where it would take them, if it could take them, if they wanted to be taken, they alighted. The way had been read but none could agree what it said, at least what it meant. In any case they had all determined, harmoniously in disagreement with each other and that was the real beginning, knowing somewhat that there was now less to be determined, at least it needn't be agreed upon which made progress a far more liberating event. Vertiginous stasis.

* The rhythm of the traditional iambic hexameter is unfortunately lost in this translation. The original is also lost. The prologue is preserved nearly in its entirety, though only as a translation. Only fragments of the three main episodes have survived. The stasima are believed to be close to complete in their preservation. The exodos is thought by some to belong to either a lost satyr play, suggesting A State of Method is part of a trilogy, or that it is an abandoned version of the first episode. The positioning of the dramaticule as the exodos, as is done so here, is also popular.
(At this point A piece of rock in allegory slowly rolls out of the dinghy and is sucked out of sight into the sandy alluvium of the swamp plain.)
Parados

The danger is in the neatness of identifications.

Beckett

Dante...Bruno.Vico...Joyce

Scene

Tempting kinship with the pre-Socratic’s conceptions of an originative substance or first principle, the activity of unknowing is here introduced as a primal mover. An ineluctable act of engagement that determines, either through a resistance to, or a willingness for, every aspect of material and immaterial being and doing. The creative gesture, the very act of life, of coming to be and of engagement with living, is not only a ‘wager on transcendence’\(^1\) but a continuous encounter with the unknown. This encounter, I (and the chorus) call the activity of unknowing, it is active and unavoidable. All knowledge stems from an initial engagement with the unknown, all life is driven from a seed whose infinite possibilities of growth cannot ever be known, pre-programmed, controlled or contained. Life is unknowing, death is known. Unknowing is a vital act, progenitive, creative. At the base of all inquiry, of all knowledge, lies this unknowing. It is the hidden, obscured originative force that precedes all movements. This thesis is a peripatetic adventure into that nebulous and indiscriminate dominion of unknowing. Through the associative affinity of ideas between disparate epochs, belief systems, cultures and continents, I would like to present unknowing as a kind of ‘human universal.’\(^2\)

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2 Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 300. In coming to terms with the peculiar resonances between culturally and historically distant thinkers, Kahn surmises that such occurrences may be reflective of something akin to a human “universal.”
This is not so much an epistemology, or non-epistemology, but if anything, an existential aesthetics. It may pertain to metaphysics in the sense that Theodore Adorno (1903-1969) claims all philosophy does, or at least did and should do. Adorno’s personal experience of a perpetual postponement of defining the subject, the “about” of metaphysics, occasioned the realisation that that was in fact the very matter of metaphysics itself. In his eternal adjournment, a procrastination borne first from naïveté and then from a slow seeping awareness of another order of rhythm that could not be traced (and nor would doing so be of any benefit) Adorno comes as close as possible to the true evanescence of metaphysics. This fleeting will-o’-the-wisp state is also perhaps as close as possible to describing the state of method that this thesis tenders as the unknowing that shepherds the creative gesture. The state of method tendered is immanent in the writing. It shapes the form, and directs the content of this thesis. The thesis is therefore not driving towards a knowing of unknowing but is driven by unknowing as the only method possible to arrive at the destined no place.

The creative act is sparked by a deep abiding unknowing. Out of this dark cave of flickering shadows we are compelled inexorably towards the light. A light of true form, a light of individual truth. But this flight is not motivated by an idea or thought, it is motivated by an existential and metaphysical conundrum. It is the conundrum that underwrites Samuel Beckett’s (1906-1989) ‘obligation to express’ which is essentially an act of survival. It is the truth seeker’s propulsion for conversion urged by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to be taken up independently by the individual ‘because I can discover my own untruth only by myself, because only when I discover it is it discovered.’ Therefore I am proposing that the conditions behind the creative gesture and which bring it into presence and which drive every compulsion of being and doing are that of an existential state of unknowing. I am calling this state a state of method for it is a method of making which is governed by a state of being.

The unknown is not considered an entity or locus or logos but rather more as a relational activity. Therefore it is not static. It is ever changing, constantly engaged

and forever elusive, thus it is that I call the unknown the activity of unknowing. Enclosed within every moment and every atom is an infinite void of unknowing. Our passage through the causal nexus of time and space is a continuous co-originating and co-expressive encounter with the unknown, such that existence in its entirety is tempered by the luminous refractions of unexpected engagement. We may well ask along with Johannus Climacus, ‘But what is this unknown against which the understanding in its paradoxical passion collides and which even disturbs man and his self-knowledge?’ and then be consoled by the efficiency of his absolute answer, ‘It is the unknown,’ for what other answer can there be? Climacus determines that this ‘unknown’ cannot be any being, or thing, human or otherwise. Then more or less for convenience sake he calls it ‘the god,’ prudently qualifying such a dramatic and hefty title with ‘it is only a name we give to it.’

Without proposing a specific query or problem it is hoped that a mode of entry will reveal itself and without prescribing answers, certain questions will be provoked. These questions might be: How is the unknown present to us and how are we present to it? What kind of an It is it? Is it an It, or more of an Is? An Eckhartian “Isness” per chance. How do the subtle persuasions of unknowing affect their presence upon us? Is the aesthetic experience or artistic endeavour a bridging between knowing and unknowing and is that bridge, as the ‘arc of metaphor,’ a means of encounter?

This method of enquiry leads definitively away from the pointless pursuit of what Adorno calls ‘the sphere of false, deceptive and, [he] would say, mythical certainty.’ While Adorno brings disgrace to myth with this statement by its alliance to falsity and deception and teams it with our nemesis “certainty,” he unwittingly proves its beguiling and paradoxical prowess. According to this thesis in its thorough approval of myth, to have “mythical certainty” would be to have the most desirable and trustworthy form of knowing. This form of certainty would be one whose North Star and Archimedean point are on the move.

There is a certain presumption that, like time passing from here to there, moving from the past and into the future, ideas and knowledge begin from an undeveloped form and move assuredly towards enlightened awareness.. Yet much of

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6 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, 39.
7 Steiner, Real Presences, 176.
8 Adorno, Metaphysics, Concept and Problems, 144.
what we might securely presume to be a genuine movement towards something solid, clarified, understood, or in other words, known, is in fact the principle effort made in the approach towards what can only ever be a knowing of non-knowing or learned ignorance. This movement is expressed by Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth to sixth century) as an “approach towards nothing” and is made for example in the processes of understanding God.\(^9\) At the triumphant moment of arrival the departure doors swings open and reveals the real destination. The success is in having another clarified point to depart from, with no return ticket and none required. Straight lines are rather satisfying, stabilising, comforting even, but they don’t actually exist. When it can be demonstrated that the infinite line is a circle, as Nicholas Cusanus\(^10\) (1401-1464) does, there is very little hope for the direct route; S bends and blind corners only engineered out for the sake of delusion. If there is any hope of encountering then ‘It must be something that can be thought to be a straight line and a circle at the same time – that is, an absolute nothingness.’\(^11\)

With the weightiest of weights pulling upon us, Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) archenemy the ‘Spirit of Gravity,’ there surfaces a challenge: to resist the natural temptation of ‘turning nothing into something.’\(^12\) This is a problem Gary Barnham identifies with the work of Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and the same can be said to arise with anything pertaining to metaphysics. The attentive and lurking threat, when the vertigo of unanswered questions overwhelms is that of turning nothing into something and the unknown into the known. But following the dusty wheel ruts of our forebears, the known, the proved, the secure, will eventually lead to a very small gene pool. We must unfasten the cangues and risk disorientation. We must leap off the ladder with Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who encourages us to leave all knowing and understanding behind to ‘see the world aright.’\(^13\)

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\(^9\) Pseudo-Dionysius; An understanding of God is not so much an approach towards something as towards nothing.

\(^10\) Also known as Nikolaus Krebs Chrypffs, Nycolaus Cancer de Coesse and Nicholas of Cusa. See Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).


The intractable and obstinate assertions of Reason, insisting on working in isolation: this is another problem. How does one break into the solitary confinement of such a well-fortified inmate? Must it be a “fugitive penetration”? Like that of the Gall’s in Beckett’s Watt, who seemingly without anything occurring, efficiently exacted their expertise upon the supplicant notes of a dormant instrument? The Gall’s though are more of a stand-in for Reason. Exercising their prodigious talents, they entered the residence of Mr Knott with great aplomb and departed with tidy conclusion, yet left Watt with an evasive but indubitable absence of real understanding. What is real understanding anyway? Felt? A matted compression of fibres. That possibly describes the state of Watt, he not being prone to feeling much. Or must it be ‘a collision at the limit of reason whose downfall is a necessary condition of approaching the idea of transcendence’?14

Setting

The pursuit of knowledge, clarity, substantiated or ‘justified true belief,’15 ‘exact conclusions,’16 fixed determined points of any orienting axis what-so-ever, statements of demonstrated fact, in short, all that a supported and validated thesis should be, is driven by a form of unknowing. It entirely depends on the risks taken as to what aspect of unknowing is engaged. It is has been made reasonably clear through the mechanisms of linguistic analysis, phenomenology and apophatic theology, for example, that we can never actually comprehend anything outside of certain personal limits of understanding. We are in other words constantly exploring that which we already intrinsically know some-how. This has two implications, one expansive and one decidedly restrictive, not to mention extremely dull. Accepting Socrates’s argument that ‘it is impossible for something known to be unknown, or for something unknown to be known,’17 unknowing is a movement towards knowing, but a knowing that we are already in possession of, yet without understanding or ‘having it.’18 The stultifying and restrictive implication of such an

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17 Plato, Theaetetus, 93.
18 Ibid., 109.
assertion is that we are trapped in our own learning and cannot ever really come to know anything outside of it. Where-as, the expansive aspect, “the boundless,” implies that even though we may be constantly grasping but without ever getting a grip, there is yet something, things, many things, which lie outside our understanding. This has a most profound and relieving effect, unlike the reality of being a man that Beckett’s Watt grapples with. Somewhat ironically, unknowing is about as solidly, concretely, empirically, logically certain as anything can get. Like death, an unknown certainty.

In the time of the epilogue, as George Steiner so poignantly claims we are, the density of the paper forest is becoming suffocating. Research now inevitably feeds off itself in a ‘parasitic discourse’ that has smothered the host to a point of non-recognition. Assailed by such a farrago of ‘criticism, meta-criticism, dia-criticism, the criticism of criticism,’ the original object or source of such reflection is annihilated. The following thesis is exemplar *par excellence* of this ‘grotesque’ imbalance. For the ensuing discourse is of a parasitic type so rarefied the host never actually existed. It needs no host, not through strength, but weakness. Its life-force is so frail that the weight of an anchor would drown it. So, with the ominous hazard of hypocrisy, saddled with the charge of contradiction pawing at the stalls, the proceeding exposition attempts to demonstrate not through explanation but description, without explanation. The tenebrous risk at play is that the only demonstration given will be that of the parasitic secondary. My use of *demonstrate* here is meant as a kind of invitation to experience, an encounter with the material presented that is in some way direct and palpable. An experience which could provoke a rather more private intimacy than what the distant tone of a *demonstrate* which has at its stronghold a quantified and verifiable observation implies.

I take Beckett as a guide, or rather Beckett takes me, as my Virgil, most adept shepherd into spheres of the unreachable unknown, this time with words on Joyce, whose writing he says, ‘is not about something; it is *that something itself.*’ Whilst not endowed with the integrity (or genius) allowed by the creation of a unique lexical

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universe to express “that something itself” I attempt, in obeisance to ‘my master and my author,’ at very least to not only be about but to also be.

This approach also takes inspiration from Thomas Kasulis’s experience of translating Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253) which he describes as an intimate act of meeting halfway, a collaborative relationship of reception, engagement and transmission with Dōgen. Comparatively, as the aphorisms of Heraclitus (535-475 B.C.) are awash with ambiguity the complexity of meanings prompts a dynamic and interpretative exchange between Heraclitus and the reader. If the ambiguity is taken as an intentional device as Kahn indicates then interpretation of the fragments necessarily solicits ‘a principle of hermeneutical generosity on the part of the reader and commentator.’ From the perspective of Steiner this generosity would be the solicitation of freedoms and the meeting of these freedoms would be a ‘cortesia.’ According to Steiner this cortesia is a necessary act of trust and discretion. It is this generosity or cortesia which allows the delicate unfolding of the creative gesture for it is between the sensitive spaces of impartment and reception that the emollient openness of a state of unknowing eases transmission.

I absolutely do not mean to imply that the following displays any of the poetic or literary authenticity that we find in the work of say Heraclitus, Dōgen and Beckett, but I absolutely do wish to appoint them as sovereign authorities as to what methodological means might be used to express something of the state of method that I here propose. Adorno cites Beckett’s works as the ‘only truly relevant metaphysical productions since the war.’ They do not shy away from the uncomfortable and unanswerable truths of human existence, like rubbish bins and all the muck in them. The aversion to such unsightliness is exactly the reason why in Adorno’s evaluation, ‘metaphysics…has slipped into material existence.’ If the matter at hand demands abandoning the straight lines of reasonability and fronting the curves with reckless abandon to effect a necessary and inevitable “collision at the limit of reason” then understandably partakers may be few. The tellurian order is strong and the spirit of gravity perhaps stronger. When even metaphysics is plunged into materialism we experience what Kierkegaard describes as ‘a muddiness of the

23 Steiner, *Real Presences*, 155, 171, 176. He says, ‘tact of heart, is of the essence,’ 155.
25 Ibid.
mind in which earthly distinction ferments almost grossly.’ 26 We are wont to know, yet not too much and the giddying crash course of unknowing certainly appears foolhardy in many lights and simply ignorant in others. In failing to achieve ‘the profound, immediate, experiential validity of Beckett’s writings’ 27 at least an example may be given as to what was aimed for.

Constantly attended by the admonishment of Beckett ‘the danger is in the neatness of identifications’ 28 and like Ruby Cohn in her treatment of the miscellaneous fragments which compose Beckett’s Disjecta, I also wish ‘to avoid embalming the whole,’ 29 through a comprehensive submersion in tidy statements of category. Attendant to Beckett and his lurking reproofs is the equally vituperate Heraclitus (I have even insinuated an inspired pairing of these two, envisaging Heraclitus as the archetypal Beckettian protagonist). Heraclitus views the learning of the polymath with disapprobation. He doubts the real effects of such aptitude for garnering nous, otherwise it would have taught his impressive predecessors. That is not to say polymathy does not have its place, but alone it will never reach the depths of fundamental insight procured through experience.

The ensuing battlefield of names, dates, ideas, declarations and declamations may very well support the scepticisms of Heraclitus by proving their wisdom (that polymathy does not promote learning), but I hope too that in taking a “step embarrassing beyond words” 30 beyond all the declarations and declarations the wisdom of Heraclitus will be discernible in a more positive incarnation.

Unknowing denounces the authority of explanation and demands that the integrity of its inherent state be left unsullied by the niggling probes of determined inquisition. Yet at the incalculable risk of flying in the face of such a withering edict

26 Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments: Johannes Climacus, 12.
27 Martin Esslin, Mediations, Essays on Brecht, Beckett, and the Media, 80. Esslin upholds the philosophical immediacy of Beckett’s prose over work advocating its own logic in representational hypothesis, writing about rather than being, proving rather than demonstrating. He identifies Sartre in particular and compares his narrative prose and theatre, which may illustrate a point but not demonstrate it, with that of Beckett, asserting the “superiority” of Beckett’s work, ‘not only because Beckett’s work is on a higher level of artistic intensity and creativeness, but also because Sartre’s narrative prose and theatre clearly bear the marks of having been preconceived as an illustration of general concepts and are therefore denied the profound, immediate, experiential validity of Beckett’s writings.’ Esslin argues that Beckett’s ‘categorical refusal to allow any philosophical meaning or thesis to be attributed to his work’ is paradoxically the very thing that imbues his work with a significance and profundity that transcends mere supposition and elevates the work to ‘human documents of great importance’ that ‘constitute the culmination of existential thought itself.’
28 Beckett, Disjecta, 19.
29 Ruby Cohn in the introduction to Disjecta, 7.
30 See second episode, p 167 in this volume for quotation reference from Steiner.
this thesis confronts the necessities of defining to some degree through some manner of explanation what it decrees inexplicable. Such a flagrant contradiction does have hidden potential. The possibility, for example, of arriving at the happy hiatus of a *coincidentia oppositorum*: the possibility of paradox, the seed of all life. A truly fruitless endeavour it would be to define the parameters of the subject, whose only substantiality is that of having none. But I would take up the paradoxical whimsy of the ‘truly false’ which as it is presented in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (as a passing jest), means something ‘having abandoned its own nature for the nature of its opposite’ can actually occur in a manner entirely opposite to itself.31

The vastness of the dimensions of thought represented in the following is expressly to make evident the thoroughly permeating, foundational, fundamental and meta-historical nature of the substanceless subject. The value of such a desiccated medley of species is justifiably questionable. The objective is that with the collective force of the ideas re-presented here and with as little speculative distortion as possible but as much imaginary flourish as the thought inspired, something of a picture will begin to transpire in which the edges may be traced, yet with the centre remaining infinitely variable in response to each act of intimacy.

I would like to refer to an image Kasulis gives us of a narrative tapestry as the way to approach the reading of Dōgen’s oeuvre, ‘In the case of Dōgen’s thought,’ he says, ‘we have something more like a tapestry depicting a single scene, rather than a fabric with a repeating pattern, so it is difficult to take any single, isolated idea as truly representative.’32 In the case of this thesis, and this introduction alone, neither can be clearly read without the full setting being present in the mind at the same time. What I am explaining here can make very little sense as a disembodied snapshot of the full picture. Each stitch adds to the whole, it does not represent it. At a glance, the chaotic profusion of ideas re-presented may defy any semblance of cohesion, especially because of the economic, positively parsimonious, provision of reasoning to weld together the ideas into an ordered whole. Like a giant wall tapestry, only when seen from a distance is the detail of singular colours and threads integrated into a meaningful picture or idea.

Thinking requires a directive. The rubrics under which we develop ideas are like anchors and compasses. But it is a very fine balance between exploratory discovery and organised expeditions to pre-ordained destinations. I have a grapnel cast, catching the current but not entirely adrift, at the behest of the captains orders.

Set

In the ‘farraginous chronicle’\(^{33}\) that follows, the line of thought is far from straight. It does not attempt to trace a chronological nor comprehensive history. The trail navigates over two millennia of recorded thought, in a haphazard manner, from the “Bitter River” of ancient surrounds to the ever flowing waters of Heraclitus, into the depths of the many staring abysses of doubt, redemption and eternal return through to the yonder shores of nirvāṇa. The odyssey sets sail from the Ionian city of Miletus some 2500 years ago with the birth of natural philosophy and with it Anaximander’s (611-546 B.C.) elusive conception of τό ἀπειρον (First Episode) and navigates the globe and her infinite nether regions through vertiginous projections of time and space into a non-existent future contained in the augenblick of being-time, to disembark on the alluvial harbour plain of Ephesus, a mere meander from the departure port (Third Episode).

Whilst not particularly about them, a few characters do emerge as protagonists whose disparate voices form the warp and weft of a very loosely woven whole. The resulting image made up as much by the gaps left between the threads, of which there are profusely more than not, for as infinite as the possibilities of form are, the formless is ever more unbounded. The leading voices are those of Heraclitus, Dōgen, Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) and Beckett. Forming the descant are Cusanus, Nietzsche and Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990), with supporting roles, cameo appearances and sonorous effects by a truly eclectic choir of songsters striking their notes with a startling harmony amidst the discord of times and temperaments. In consonance with the idea of bi-directionality derived from Nishida and which by extension dissolves a unilateral sense of time, and with a little ‘green mountains’

\(^{33}\) James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 554. This quote taken from Joyce meant to describe life in general, but I would like to appropriate it here to explain the style of discourse, which notwithstanding, is certainly to some degree (I hope, for that is certainly my intention) a reflection of how life might be interpreted.
walking,’ these estranged participants can be ushered into a relatively meaningful grouping. They are not necessarily related by fields of interest and expertise though they may share some, and nor by historical association or the customary lineal understanding of time but possibly more by the one resounding question that Nishitani identifies as the basis of any existential enquiry (and by default the religious quest) ‘For what do I myself exist?’

By introducing this question here I am suggesting that the same question can be found airing its bemusing innuendo close to the central motivations of the heterogeneous ideas and thoughts presented in the following by the partaking team.

Commenting on the possibility of influences and connections between Ancient Greece and the Orient, Kahn surmises that it is just as probable for a spontaneous simultaneity of ideas to occur in like-minded people irrespective of geographical or historical proximity. This perspective brings a whole new dimension to comparative methods of research and is much more favourably aligned with the approach taken in this thesis than a strictly historical methodology.

In accord with the content each episode is arranged slightly differently. The first as a general appraisal with many thematic variations takes on a numbering system. The second, which is more literary and descriptive, simply uses titles to divide the chapter. The third being formulated around ruins breaks the chapter up into fragments. These fragments are incomplete as one would find the fragments of a ruin. The term “fragment” is also a genuflection to all of the ancient thinkers, makers, designers, inventors and writers of the world whose work is left to us in fragments that we endeavour to reconstruct - the process of which must entail a very dynamic and creative exchange with unknowing.

Some categories re-occur in different settings. This is because they are to be thought of as both nouns and verbs, so to speak. As nouns ideas would occur in the

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34 Eihei Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, trans. Robert Aitken, Reb Anderson, Ed Brown, Norman Fischer, Arnold Kotler, Daniel Leighton, Lew Richmond, David Schneider, Kazuaki Tanahashi, Katherine Thanas, Brian Unger, Mel Weitsman, Dan Welch and Philip Whalen and ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1995), 98. The phrase ‘green mountains’ walking’ is taken from the ‘Mountains and Waters Sūtra’ of Dōgen. The sense of the phrase I would like to appropriate for my purposes here is that when we relinquish the usual perception of things understanding expands. For example the idea that mountains do not walk just because their walking doesn’t appear to be like human walking.

first chapter under the auspices of ‘the unknown’ and as verbs in the second chapter under ‘methods of meeting.’

The first episode is an exploration of different occurrences and encounters with the unknown, under the epithet of “the countenance of unknowing,” in other words, how the activity of unknowing might appear to us. The appearance or experience of this activity is more readily recognised in some thing or idea that is unknown or unknowable by its nature and that is why I am calling “the unknown” the “countenance of unknowing.” It may appear for example as an idea within philosophy that depends in some way on an unknowable principle or element. The Buddhist conception of śūnyatā (emptiness) would fall into this category as would the absolute nothingness as espoused by the Kyoto school of philosophy. The spacings and lacunae of linguistic theory would be another incidence of how the unknown might occur. These thetic gaps also have particular resonance with the void of śūnyatā, the infinite, the indefinite and boundless τὸ ἀπειρον (the apeiron), the oblivion of memory’s edge that Marc Augé writes of and the unreadable silent centres of books of which Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) writes.

The episode takes the form of a general, non-comprehensive, discursive appraisal of these so-called occurrences of the unknown. Loosely woven around the apeiron, this recurring leitmotif snakes its way through the labyrinth of notions and images as a grounding yet intangible theme. The meaning of the apeiron is crudely understood as ‘the indefinite’ or ‘boundless.’ Both of these terms and concepts have immediate relevance for even the most basic idea of what unknowing might be. Furthermore, quite apart from its philosophical and scientific connotations, the apeiron is a concept shrouded in mystery and is essentially an unknowable and unverifiable idea. For both of these reasons I have chosen it as an appropriate and somewhat symbolic thematic footing.

It is suggested the apeiron is a very early rendering of the coincidentia oppositorum and as the architect of this floating structure Anaximander is by default positioned betwixt two opposing worlds. Even though held by most to be at the inception of a scientific movement away from archaic world conceptions he himself still stands as an antecedent to the bridging of worlds that Heraclitus is generally more recognised for. At the nexus of a rift between scientism and mythology Anaximander does not entirely abandon the shifting and thaumaturgic perspectives of the mythological world. We need look no further than the concept of the apeiron
for exemplification of this ambiguous role. It is precisely the unresolved and contradictory positioning that makes him inadvertently perfectly poised as a gateway to both views. Apart from merely his words being poetic as Simplicius reports, there is something undeniably lyrical about the graceful might of the apeiron.

Broken up into some twenty-six thematic divisions, these parts, some small vignettes, others fully dressed scenes, are the pulpy protuberances issuing from the void, like impudent blemishes on the perfect complexion of nothingness, a ripple on the stillest surface of serene emptiness. Like border points or docking stations, beached peninsulas exposed to the north-east-south-west winds of speculation, each idea even most briefly sighted, traces an outline of the formless form and draws a discernible face upon which to fix the minds-eye. But like the mask of persona which Nishitani defines as ‘through and through real’ there is however, nothing at all behind it. The mask, the outcrop, the peripheral blip is the through and through real form of absolute nothingness. The appearance of unknowing in forms, concepts and ideas that grapple with inexactitudes and unknowable moving indeterminable elements of flux, paradox, contradiction, imaginary realities and illusion to name a few is the through and through real mask of the unknown. It is this mask to which the first episode attends.

The divisions of the episode follow two orderings. One is that of a standard numeric system in which related subsets are grouped under the same number. For example “The Apeiron” as the first section, is number 1. All other parts that relate to the apeiron are accordingly grouped under 1. For example, “Oblivion and Memory” which as its own section and theme still relates back to apeiron and is therefore 1.2. However, unlike most numbering systems, the ordering of this standardised numerical system is not consecutive. This is because there is another more intuitive ordering of themes. There are subtle links between most of the divisions and it is these links that direct the actual ordering of the episode. Not surprisingly there is an ordered sense of chaos about the structure. The intended effect is that the reader will somehow experience something of what is being written about in the very processes involved in navigating the ideas presented. The unexplained and more subtle links will likewise hopefully invite the reader to take up their own path of meaning by meeting halfway with the text.

36 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 71.
To assist the reader, a little nudge towards the general current, to ease the nose into the flow, sniff out the general direction and follow the whiff upon the wind in sail, each subset is précised with a brief indication of why it presumes to be part of the whole; like ambiguous arrows on a track to nowhere. As Carter Wheelock writes in the context of Jorge Luis Borges’s (1899-1986) ‘tantalizingly cryptic’ prose, there is the possibility that much like the brief comments Borges may on occasion provide for his reader ‘these little aids’ may not serve ‘the imperious hunger for the explanation of it all.’ I would hope though that they do impart some form of information, even if it be ‘only the value of another oblique metaphor.’37 All of the ideas presented are seen to be in some way engaged with, formed by, or are in the process of creating or exposing an unknown principle. Or they may simply incite the void, the great abyss of unknowing as we contemplate their significance, their meaning or presence in our world.

The second episode is concerned more with the methods in which we might come to deal with or engage with this activity of unknowing. Methods that might provoke an encounter with unknowing, and if not, then are certainly open and inviting to the possibility. The invitation implies at very least a recognition of unknowing and this second episode endeavours to present some of those methods in possession of invitations.

As the dominant mode of the following is necessarily that of language and because of the stated intention to demonstrate rather than explicate, it follows that the demonstration necessarily be imparted through aspects of language. Accordingly this episode is dominated by the presence of language, although not entirely. And importantly, the prominence of language here is not meant to imply the equivalent imbalance in the actual presence of unknowing in the world at large. The points made should be thought of as metaphoric as much as being specific to the subject in question.

For example, one of the final sections of the episode, titled “Elusive understanding; whose language?” considers the inventiveness of personal languages to transmit meanings, the results of which are often thought so obtuse that no meaning can be gleaned whatsoever. This is not exclusive to language alone but is a

feature of all creative exertions reaching for some hitherto unknown and probably ungraspable newness and perhaps most overtly in the visual and plastic arts. What can be taken from the offering of this part through its example of language, is a mode of engaging with the unfathomable, the recondite and the unknown - through unknowing. In this instance it is called transmission, but to open to the transmission one must be willing to let go of understanding and allow the knowing of non-knowing to seep in through the cracks of our constructed realities.

As another example, the following section of the episode, titled “The concrete and everyday reality; lived experience,” introduces the idea of true lived experience as a standpoint outside of objective knowledge. It is one of the exceptions to the dominant treatment of language matters per se, though by proxy language will obviously be a part of lived and everyday experience. Somewhat paradoxically, the minutiae and supposed trivia of diurnal routine are presented as the secret passage – disguised by their commonplace invisibility – past objectified knowledge. To use this example as a paradigm for how the activity of unknowing might occur and how we can apply it outside of the given context I would suggest one possibility as an idea. In everything we do and everything that is right before us, often anonymous in its prominence and obviousness, there is the potential for radical conversion. Right on the other side of knowing is the infinite and obscured face of unknowing, but everything looks the same – on the outside. Everyday reality is not just washing the bowls and polishing the spoons, it is seeing the refracting and magical reflections of the dustless mind beaming back off the surface of the spoon. Unknowing is not a cloudy and turgid soup of mashed nothingness, it is every little possible taste and flavour and scent that we have yet to discover.

The third episode is an adventure indirectly into, out of, through and behind the formless form of the state of method that the previous two episodes have set up. In this final episode ruins are cast as an uncanny and quintessential representative of what I put forward as the features distinctive to the state of method of unknowing. These features, or, better said: flags, beacons, portents, hints, glimmers, indicators, auguries or evocative signals, are the unity or identity of opposites, somewhat cryptically yet potently described by the Heraclitean phrase palintropos harmoniē (a tuning or fitting together which comes about through a turning back on itself) or the coincidentia oppositorum of Cusanus, all of which have their affiliations with paradox, another principal indicator. These are joined by the poetic voice, metaphor
and symbolic imagery, any notion in dalliance with the infinite, void, eternity and śūnyatā (emptiness). What all of these have in common is a pronounced leaning towards ambiguity. Either/or is definitely not part of this picture. This and that become this and that is this and this and that is this and that is that and this.

As the first episode is guided by the leitmotif of the apeiron, the “boundless,” this episode is conducted through the eternal passages of boundless time. In Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* the image of the hour glass is considered a synecdoche for the greater cosmological dimensions of his theory of eternal return and here time is suggestively used as a type of synecdoche for unknowing. Three particular treatments of time are absorbed and reconfigured in relationship to the ruin and each other as an exposition of this synecdoche. These are: the concept of ruin time taken from Florence Hetzler, being-time (uji) from Dōgen and various configurations of the nunc stans, most prominently, Nietzsche’s conception of augenblick (moment or in the blink of an eye). With the troubling aid of time the coincidentia oppositorum is fittingly enacted as our idea of time both helps and hinders understanding. With the things most familiar to us we have to throw the mind off its habitual course to see the world aright. As Dōgen warns in the fascicle *Uji* just because the appearance of time as coming and going is common to all this by no means indicates that all have a right understanding of time. Precisely because it is so close to us we do not doubt or question it thoroughly enough to really comprehend it. This thinking echoes that expressed by Heraclitus when he writes that whilst the logos is common to all they (the all) fail to comprehend it. It is only the obvious that is comprehended and the obscure or enigmatic are left for those willing to doubt, question or discover. In both Heraclitus and Dōgen this discovery is an entirely independent and individual venture therefore it is unable to be stated in absolutes or fixed terms. These are but some of the byways taken on the path of unknowing.

Ruins are generalised into an archetype, avoiding any historical or archaeological investigation that would be pertinent to a specific site but for the present purposes is not of significance or assistance. Through their metaphysical topography ruins are staged as an outward and palpable manifestation of unknowing, an appropriately contradictory possibility. They give formal substance to a substanceless form and do so without the usual weightiness of gravity which always threatens to overwhelm the haze with smoke.
The flâneur of the imaginary is invoked and invited to experience this creative bi-directional expressive state conditioned by unknowing in a meta-existential meander through ruins being time. The physical site (imagined) exists through a paradoxical dialectic of presence and absence. It exhibits all of the unifying contradictions that colour the strokes of unknowing as they paint their image of life into our being.

**In short**

Certain qualities are indicated as auguries of where might dwell the activity of unknowing, and at the same time what qualities this activity might come to arise from. These are paradox, poetry, metaphoric and symbolic language, transitions of opposites in unity or coincidence, conceptions of the infinite, faith and the religious quest, the verity of illusion, time as a momentary and continuous meeting with being, the pursuit of the existential subject in any manner, openings and awakenings to presence, mutual bi-directional exchanges that could be of absence and presence, universals and particulars or negations and affirmations.

Ruins are introduced as a navigable material means of encountering the nebulous dominion of unknowing. The fragmentary form of incessant becoming that sketches their ever changing vista finds its parallels in the philosophical concepts of Dōgen’s *ujis*, Nishida’s *basho*, Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence and Heraclitus’s theories of flux and the identity of opposites.

Atop his 100 foot pole Dōgen casts off.

Zeus reigns thunderous yet.

…and then perhaps this is more about Beckett (the work of) than anything else. Beckett is the “fugitive penetration.” A metaphysical quest enacted through the mask of *illusion*. However, as is established, the “through and through” realness of this mask is the face of *reality* that we encounter through the mask.
N.B.

On the matter of God; there is no doubt that the God inference is active in much of what is presented here and it should be understood at the outset that whilst I am not taking any measures to avoid this inference – the inference of the presence of God, not only here but everywhere – neither am I purposefully implying it. It seems to me that God - apart from the distinct disadvantage of being nothing short of a swear-word, the inverted modern blaspheme, nearly as bad as “post-modern” - in certain rather dominant spheres of the rationalised and realistic, is a very convenient mode or concept through which the mode or concept of unknowing finds particularly steady footing.

In Walter Benjamin’s (1892-1940) perennially influential treatise on translation, he defines the act of translation as a mode. The task of the translator is to return to the mode of the original text. The translation is not about the broadcasting of information but the communication of an encounter with the text as it was once conceived and then now as it is received. Consequently to be true to the original the translation will never be the same as it. If the God concept, or more importantly the individual’s relationship to the God concept, can be thought of as a translatable mode then it would be this mode which, in a ‘cloud of unknowing,’ moves us towards absolute nothingness and can be appropriated as an example of what I am not defining as unknowing.

So be satisfied with abridged allusion and brief hints, since the verification of this discussion would call for laying down principles and explaining details which my present moment does not allow, nor do my concern and thought turn toward such things. The keys of hearts are in God’s hand; He opens hearts when He wills, as He wills, and how He wills. The only thing opening up at this moment is three chapters.

First Episode

The Unknown

The Countenance of Unknowing
I

The Unknown

The Countenance of Unknowing

1. The Apeiron

Boundless, infinite and indefinite, Anaximander’s τὸ ἄπειρον (the apeiron) is a most befitting beginning to the ensuing adopted family of ideas that through conceptual kinship I am housing together under the aithereal rubric of the unknown. If this exploration was at all faithful to the entropy of times arrow then τὸ ἄπειρον would be the appropriate historical starting point for the investigation. It may also be misleading to commence this far from historical record, at the inception of what could be deemed the (documented) seed from which sprout the following wandering tendrils of thought. Yet by doing so invites certain presumptions of direction and thus more pointedly initiates the primal movement of unknowing which treads a very fine line between the unexpected and the mistaken. By being misled we may have the fortune to happen upon ‘the trackless and unexplored,’¹ and there, if at all anywhere, we might encounter the elusive trail of the unknown. The unfathomable nature of Anaximander’s τὸ ἄπειρον, not only as a concept but also because of the tremendous complications with doxographical evidence, makes of it an archetypal unknown. I do not think it insignificant that such an enigmatic and unrestrained idea as τὸ ἄπειρον features so early in the annals of speculative thought, and whilst reneging on an anti-linear standpoint on time, I suggestively position this seed of all doubt at the beginning of this appraisal and will repeatedly return to it throughout this episode as a token and perhaps ironic anchor.

First Episode

Anaximander is part of a trilogy of Milesians, along with Thales (624-546 B.C.) before him and his younger contemporary Anaximenes (585-525 B.C.), who forged a way through the thunderbolts and foam of the land of mythos to the well paved road of logos. Thales heads the procession and marks the beginning of a rationalist approach to the recondite mysteries of the natural world through new empirical methods based on primarily observable phenomena that abandon the mytho-poeic formulations of the archaic world conception. Whilst Thales claims the honorific title of the first philosopher, it is Anaximander’s development of a new cosmology that, in the words of Charles Kahn, ‘asserted itself with the total force of a volcanic eruption’ and which can be described as ‘the springhead of Greek natural philosophy.’

A cosmogony that was largely genealogical and most notable in the Theogony of Hesiod (between 750-650 B.C.) persisted up until Thales. Indeed inclusive of Thales the effects of the mythological precedents are still evident even whilst speculations and measurements of the heavenly bodies were urging belief systems in an entirely new direction. The new Ionian cosmogonical speculation was still signatory to the burning questions left unanswered from Hesiod’s Theogony ‘What gods were born in the beginning? Who first of all, who next?’ Creation myths, primordial origins, teleologies, ‘waxings and wanings and destructions,’ still dominated early Greek natural philosophy. Enduring and inconclusive, speculation on an originative substance, cause or first principle remains unclarified, the only definitive supposition, its indefinability. Whether or not meant as an originative substance, if a substance at all, the apeiron (τὸ ἀπειρὸν) of Anaximander is regarded as a form of arche (ἀρχή) or first principle (in company with nearly every other basic element that presented with any obvious credentials in immediate and observable phenomena).

The apeiron of Anaximander perhaps heralds the first fathoming and explication within a Western context, outside of a mythological or theological

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3 Ibid. 6.
4 ‘Although these ideas were strongly affected, directly or indirectly, by mythological precedents.’ See G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 98.
5 Kahn, Anaximander, 200.
6 Ibid. Kahn takes this from the atomist Leucippus (early fifth century BC).
framework, of an unknowable yet omnipresent generative force, and as Aryeh Finkelberg states, ‘Anaximander’s *Apeiron* is perhaps the most obscure notion in Greek philosophy.’ Scholarly polemic surrounding the *apeiron* inadvertently illustrates the very *sine qua non* of the concept, its essentially ungraspable, uncontainable and abstruse nature. The task of understanding Anaximander’s concept of the *apeiron* is fraught with a magnitude of perhaps insurmountable hurdles, not least of which is the fact that, as Kahn explicitly demonstrates, in the one extant fragment available through the doxographical evidence, there is, even if just on grammatical grounds, ‘no term in the fragment which could refer to the ἄπειρον.’

The actual fragment in question is preserved as a mixture of quotation and comment by Theophrastus (c.371-287 B.C.) who, as a pupil of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), compiled a vast history of philosophical thought as part of a grandiose encyclopaedic project of Aristotle’s. Unfortunately most of the general history and all of the more detailed accounts of specific philosophers have perished. There are three principle versions of Theophrastus’s account. They come to us through Simplicius writing a millennium later, who is considered the most accurate and reliable source, and also from Pseudo-Plutarch of the second century A. D. and Hippolytus from the third century A. D. Whilst Simplicius, due to his apparent diligence and faithful renditions of original extracts is regarded as a trustworthy source of verbatim quotations from Theophrastus, there is still some contention as to whether he actually had recourse to the original *Phys. Opin.* (Φυσικῶν Δόξαι) or was reliant on another commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* by Alexander of Aphrodisias - which is now also lost.

This rather rudimentary excursion into the “excerpts and epitomes” of Anaximander should at least give some indication of the hazardous distillation

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10 See Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 104. Also on compendium or full volume of Anaximander’s original book that Theophrastus was quoting from see Kahn *Anaximander*, 12-24 and Kirk 111, ‘One of Aristotle’s most acute ancient commentators, Alexander of Aphrodisias.’
process of the doxographical sources, that doesn’t necessarily result in the extraction of a rarefied essence. As Kahn so flatly submits ‘all we can attempt to do is refine the surviving ore out of the dross that has accumulated through centuries of excerpts and epitomes.’

The flecks and glints of promise are all embedded within the following fragment:

Anaximander [son of Praxiades, of Miletus, the successor and pupil of Thales] declared the Boundless \([τὸ \ άπειρον]\) to be the principle and element of existing things, having been the first to introduce this very term of “principle”; he says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some different, boundless nature, from which all the heavens arise and the κόσμοι within them; out of those things whence is the generation for existing things, into these again does their destruction take place, according to what must needs be; for they make amends and give reparation to one another for their offense, according to the ordinance of time, speaking of them thus in rather poetical terms. It is clear that, having observed the change of the four elements into one another, he did not think fit to make any one of these the material substratum, but something else besides these. (Phys. Opin. Simplicius)

It would be reasonable to surmise that the ensuing polemic around Anaximander’s \(\text{\textit{apeiron}}\) was due chiefly, if not entirely, to the muddling and meddling of minds, often whose main prerogative was to confirm or support their own conceptual frameworks. Both Aristotle and Theophrastus are liable on that count. H.B. Gottschalk believes that most attempts to describe the \(\text{\textit{apeiron}}\) fall into the same error as Aristotle, which comes from “trying to describe the \(\text{\textit{Apeiron}}\) in terms which make sense to themselves and their audience.” These terms are generally in accordance with theories of prime matter or principle substances from which all other things derive, be it in a modified sense or contained as potentiality within the \(\text{\textit{ἀρχή}}\) itself. Or, in the outlook of Aristotle, a complete abandoning of systems predicated on origins, for these still implicitly corroborate the creation myths, and so the \(\text{\textit{ἀρχή}}\) as a point or site of inception is rejected outright. Complicit

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11 Kahn, \textit{Anaximander}, 12. This is not to suggest that an incredible amount of ore has not been mined, and I hope that this most cursory evaluation serves not to diminish or demean those efforts in any way but rather to marvel at the quantity of value that has been extrapolated considering the involved and complex process of extraction.

12 Ibid., 166.

First Episode

with this rejection is his idea of an ‘eternal and ungenerated’ world. This shift in the fundamental constructs of early Greek thought did not however take-off. The initial revolutionary spark of scientific scandal dwindled to a dim light, and the two foremost schools of Hellenistic thought continued to fuel the Vulcan forge and ‘generate the cosmos.’\textsuperscript{14} Beginnings of course cannot exist without endings – albeit if the beginning and end are common\textsuperscript{15} - so consequently, generation naturally requests company of its partner destruction. On this count though ‘there does not seem to have been the same unanimity.’\textsuperscript{16} Reflective perhaps of the great mystery that death continues to be, though curiously it is the only unavoidable and known certainty in life.

The inference of a material substance dominates the interpretations of Aristotle and in following him, that of Theophrastus. In brief summation of the evidence, Gottschalk concludes that, as they understood it, ‘Anaximander’s ἀρχή was a principle “of the material kind”’ and ‘It is corporeal but not identical with any of the elements or any other known substance.’\textsuperscript{17} However, as Gottschalk also tells us, ‘It is now generally agreed that Anaximander’s Infinite is not material in any real sense.’\textsuperscript{18}

1.1 Lost Ancestors

The (pointless) pursuit of certainty and the insatiable desire for understanding are the chief ingredients of constructed (delusional) reality. There is no Archimedean point to plumb our pirouette, no X marking the spot, nor an archival blue print by which we can understand the score of living. But that does not negate the value of searching for the possibility of one. In the process of searching, the potential for numinous connection may be revealed and a continuity of malleable form may be perceived.

\textsuperscript{14} Kahn, \textit{Anaximander}, 203.
\textsuperscript{15} Heraclitus, Fr. D. 103 In the case of a circle[‘s circumference] beginning and end are common. Translation from T.M. Robinson, \textit{Heraclitus: Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary}, (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 61.
\textsuperscript{16} Kahn, \textit{Anaximander}, 200.
\textsuperscript{17} Gottschalk, ‘Anaximander’s “Apeiron,”’ 43.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 1. Here Gottschalk is borrowing from the opening declaration of W. Krauss’s article \textit{Apeiron}, written fifteen years earlier for his own initial statement.
The bookkeeper (he remained nameless) of Kierkegaard’s parable *A Possibility*, is a perfect model for the fruitless lunacy of looking for precise answers under the fallacious auspices of ‘exact conclusions.’ In pursuit of a possibility the bookkeeper applied his own theory of potentiality to prime matter, and like Aristotle it was confirmation he required, ‘there is an x which has to be sought for... an eternal presumption seeking to corroborate its certainty,’ and thus he pursued the x, the unknown, the possibility, desirous of its knowledge ‘to transform that x into a known quantity.’

In pursuit of another X, pointedly capitalised, Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) coins the word ‘numinous’ to better classify the peculiar *sui generis* mental state which obtains to an experience ‘of the spirit.’ Otto’s X can never be concretely known or found, or taught. It can be inferred by negation, ‘this X of ours is not precisely this experience, but akin to this one and the opposite of that other,’ but ultimately it will evade classification and will only be met with in the most remote regions of personal experience, ‘In other words our X cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes ‘of the spirit’ must be awakened.’

Perhaps it was the determinism for ‘exact conclusions’ that led Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) to lament that ‘poor Aristotle... missed the entire way.’ Whilst the bookkeeper had gracefully retired from the standard forms of social coherency, I do not wish to imply Aristotle was treading the same thin line, yet if it is ‘a crazy observer [who] sees perhaps most, his observation is more intense and more persistent’ as Kierkegaard supposes, then it may well have served Aristotle to lose sight a little in order to gain some more.

Comparing his task to that of a palaeontologist, Kahn, with the bookkeeper, traces a propinquity of filial resemblance to ‘reconstruct the lost ancestor.’ He defends and attests to an essential unity and intrinsic continuity that forms the whole picture of early Greek speculation on the natural world. A continuity he suggests,

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20 Ibid., 114.
23 Ibid., 109.
that the ancient doxography has neglected. However, with recourse to the well spring of early Greek literature, namely Homer (c. eighth century B.C.) and Hesiod, he assures us that it ‘should be possible to put some semblance of flesh and blood on the dry skeleton of Milesian philosophy.’ The genealogical structure of Hesiod’s cosmogony exerts its influence in the use of biological metaphors in Anaximander.

This is precisely the kind of continuity that Kahn is pointing out. As it is ‘natural and historically appropriate’ for Anaximander to use biological analogies, so too then is it appropriate for the interpretation of his ideas. Yet, the extension of the analogy has not served to resolve or clarify the purpose. For logically, if the very process of analogy – that of inception, gestation, birth, generation and death – ‘remains mysterious at a certain level’ then how can it reveal the hidden meanings to which it itself is not privy. However, it is once again the presence of continuity which makes the analogies so apposite. A metaphor could hardly be considered metaphoric if it did not contain the same basic elements as that of which it is the similitude, and in this case, those basic elements are imperspicuous mystery and inscrutable indeterminacy.

1.10 Off-Spring: Universals and Particularrays

Only through the great mystery of death and the alchemical magic of dissolution does new life emerge. The transformation from was to is is made through a startling and utter abandonment of form and disappearance of the was. There can be no is if the was persists. Of course the is immediately becomes a was and thus the cycle proceeds, perpetuated by an infinitesimal passage from one life to the next. Here indeterminacy and chaos are allied as principle generative powers which there-by stand in relation to the apeiron, and by insinuated association, equating the driving force of life with a cosmology of unknowing.

Whilst the nature or composition of the apeiron is held to be indeterminate, it is imbued by most with a ‘fertility and fecundity’ which makes it either generative or denotes a kind of boundless reservoir from which all life emerges. Conceived of (without conception) as a first principle (ἀρχή-arche), the apeiron is charged with

25 Kahn, Anaximander, 5.
26 Graham, Explaining the Cosmos, 33.
the usual parental duties and expectations. It “surrounds” the world, like the protective (smothering?) embrace of an “everlasting” presence from which issues forth eternal unconditioned life. So complete and thorough is it in its role that there is no need of ‘other causes, such as mind or love’ to ‘steer all’ as Aristotle tells us.\(^{27}\)

Upon first principles inherited from the mythological cosmogonies, and of which he includes Anaximander’s *apeiron*, Gottschalk informs us, ‘these entities only acted as the first parents of the universe. Once it had developed, they had no more part in it.’\(^{28}\) Similarly it is described by Daniel Graham as ‘the parent or matrix…out of which the world and its component stuffs come to be, but it is not itself the matter of the world.’\(^{29}\)

Providence, not of madness, but of the microscope uncannily reveals the same universal relationships but on a cellular level. From Georges Bataille’s (1897-1962) *L’Érotisme*, Italo Calvino (1923-1985) translates this description of biological generation:

In asexual reproduction, the simplest entity which is the cell divides at a point in its growth. The nucleus divides into two equal parts, and from a single entity two result. But we cannot say that a first entity has given birth to a second. The two new entities are, to the same degree, the products of the first. The first has disappeared. Essentially, it is dead, since only the two entities it has produced survive…The first dies, but *in its death* appears a fundamental instant of continuity.\(^{30}\)

Aristotle would perhaps verify such an event as the necessary outcome of a finite material world, as he states, ‘it is possible for the destruction of one thing to be the generation of the other, the sum of things being limited.’\(^{31}\) The *apeiron* remains elusive, outside the world as ‘a source but not its ground or substratum.’

\(^{27}\) …of the infinite there is no beginning…but this seems to be the beginning of the other things, and to surround all things and steer all, as all those say who do not postulate other causes, such as mind or love, above and beyond the infinite. And this is the divine; for it is immortal and indestructible, as Anaximander says and most of the physical speculators. Aristotle *Phys.* Kirk 114.


\(^{29}\) Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos*, 33.


through the whole system and through ‘its offspring’ can we glean something of its munificent activity.  

The moment of death, of closure and finitude in the cell is the simultaneous opening to a new life form. The last gasp of the living, a yawn perhaps, agape at the wonderment of life spawning chaos confronted in the augenblick of passing. The basic meaning of chaos (χάος) is a derivative of ‘gape, gap, yawn’ and in the Hesiodic cosmogony is not altogether dissimilar to the apeiron in its progenitive capacities and (im)material indeterminacy. 

The filial bond is perhaps the most accessible performance of the confounding interplay of universals and particulars open to all members of the public, upper tiers and standing room available.

2. Chaos

How can anything be secured in the maelstrom of chaos? How can knowing settle amidst such a blizzard of teeming possibilities? It is not a daring leap from Chaos to the Unknown. The unknown is everything else that we cannot hear, read or see. It is a raucous silence which presides at the beginning, or perhaps the centre? The end? Ancient Greek mythology charges Chaos with a grand responsibility, the receptacle of all Ideas, the ultimate void, the breath of all life. A God before Gods. Time slips in, otherwise unannounced from the wings, unavoidably demanding.

At the centre of every great book - writes Blanchot - there is poised a silent speech, a speaking of non-speaking, an ‘unreadability.’ With the death of the last writer ‘this gentle breath of endless recapitulation’ cannot be quelled. It is the writer alone who muffles the din of this ‘secret speech’ by imposing their own will upon it, giving it voice, a voice that can be heard, understood. Blanchot conjures ‘another kind of underworld,’ an underworld within an underworld, the centre of unreadability in the forbidden books of libraries which await a fate of flames.  

Chaos too has its dubious affiliations with the underworld. An excerpt from the

32 Graham, Explaining the Cosmos, 44.
33 This is generally translated as ‘moment.’ For further discussion and explication of the term and my usage of it see the third episode, Fragment X.
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_Theogony_ details another fate of flames in a thunderbolt hurling episode of Zeus’s (an activity worthy of infamy) directed at the earth-born Titans:

And the darting gleam of thunderbolt and lightning blinded the eyes even of strong men. A marvellous burning took hold of Chaos; and it was the same to behold with the eyes or to hear the noise with the ears as if the earth and broad heaven above drew together; for just such a great din would have risen up.\[35\]

Exactly what quarters Chaos keeps in/under the world is a disputed area. How the heat and flames could penetrate to the underworld, albeit steered by the almighty wrath of Olympian measure, suggests that Chaos does after all reside in the hallowed void where Aither and Earth wave and waft at each other. In the in-between: a gap, an awning of continuity, a continuous yawn, a gaping passage between, from which the silent utterances, the “great din” of another secret speech issue forth.

Meanwhile, in a far off sovereign state, under the commanding nib of Beckett, an ‘incoherent continuum’ punctuated by a dehiscent ‘statement of silences’ collapses back into chaos as ‘notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons’: the trailing fulgour of Zeus’s pyrotechnic lash-out?\[36\]

One scholar, Gregory Vlastos, has suggested that it was from Hesiod’s cosmogonical Ἀιθέρ (Aither) that Anaximander derived his τὸ ἄπειρον. It is not an altogether appealing or fortunate heritage if that be the case. Hesiod’s ‘murky Chaos’ may share in the subfusc gloam of mystery that veils the _apeiron_ but Chaos is alone in the ‘dank’ and ‘grievous storm’ that marks its limits and which ‘even the gods detest.’\[37\] From the intermediary interstice of the _apeiron_ comes the chaotic yawn of life, an unreadable and unspeakable continuum of incoherency. Together there-in resides comings and goings, birth and death, generation and destruction, chaos and kosmos (κόσμος), ‘the source of coming-to-be for existing things is that into which destruction, too, happens “according to necessity…according to the assessment of

35 Kirk and Raven, _The Presocratic Philosophers_, 27.
37 Kirk and Raven, _The Presocratic Philosophers_, 30.
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Time.”38 So commands mighty Chronos (Χρόνος) who thus dispensing judgment initiates the cycles of Natures passage.

3. Χρόνος and Uji

Time is fickle, sly and flexible beyond measure. It is not the unquestionable and steadfast gauge by which we bind together our would-be hovering and disorientated experiences that it is oft presumed to be. Time is an incalculable calculator because it is individually activated. I might even go so far as to say Time is the presiding grand conductor of the silent tintinnabulum orchestra, the Unknown. But that would be decidedly rash.

In an alternate assessment of time, Zen master Dōgen39 condenses the seriätim passage of the world into the blink of an eye. Time is experienced inseparable from being, that is, time literally is being time. The passage of being-time (uji), as Dōgen terms it, is exerted in the blink of an eye ‘for the time being, I let him raise his eyebrows and blink his eyes.’40 With the softening persuasions of being, times arrow is directed off course, though only to return. The moment of passing through (exit, off-course) is the very moment of re-entry, yet with all that has passed between contained in the augenblick of being-time, ‘Just reflect: right now, is there an entire being or an entire world missing from your present time, or not?’41

In Dōgen’s intriguing conception of being-time, an idea Thomas Cleary introduces as, ‘one of the most, if not the most, striking and original presentations in Dōgen’s thought,’42 time alone is not ordained gate keeper of our comings and goings, but shares the porters door with being, an equally omnipotent yet aloof abstraction. The dynamic interdependence of ‘this exhaustive reciprocal interpenetration’43 means every point, every moment of past, future and present, exists as a continuous activity of an immediate now. There is no separation of matter

39 Known as Eihei Dōgen, Dōgen Zenji or Kigen Dōgen.
41 Ibid., 50.
43 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, nt. 29, 53.
from passage, nothing comes into being separate from time nor passes through time without being. Nothing can pass away outside of time for even death is being-time and in that moment of passing there resides all times as a resolute indestructible being.

Dōgen’s formulation of uji is fundamental to Nishitani’s configuration of the non-objective mode of being of the self as it appears on the field of śūnyatā. The true ‘selfness of the self’ that emerges on this field is a ‘being bottomlessly in time’ and in unison with emptiness. Just as this selfness opens up on the homeground of absolute nothingness that lies at the bottom of all being, this same homeground opens up within the self. By this same ‘circuminsessional interpenetration’ Nishitani explains the interaction between time and the selfness of the self as it opens up on the field of śūnyatā within time. Once again, as with Dōgen, time is not something that is seen to pass through being but that is in being as much as being is in time.

The birth-and-death cycle is nothing other than the active emanation of being-time. Neither in life nor death are we separate from time. We are both born and die in time, but we are not merely within time but are time itself: ‘we do not simply live in time: we live time. From one moment in time to the next we are making time to be time, we are bringing time to the “fullness of time.”’

4. *Prosōpon* and Real Appearances

A subterfuge duplicity, that is, a real appearance, or, a mask. Borderland territories marked out by the impressions of either side. An acquaintance or family of old duck-rabbit, the sneaky fairground illusionist that taints our most sincere beliefs with a backstage double pass. The authenticity of an appearance lies in its not trying to be what it is, it could be anything, and so without force reveals itself paradoxically by being what it isn’t. A mask. The Unknown is not so much the real appearance behind the mask of the known but the mask as the real appearance of the Unknown.

A sustained and unyielding effect of René Descartes (1596-1650) *ego cogito* is what Nishitani describes as a ‘person-centred prehension of person.’ He

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appropriates the ‘ancient concept of *persona*’ to articulate the paradoxical actualisation of a ‘Form of non-Form’\(^{46}\) in a radical re-configuration of “person.”

The Latin *persona* is derived from the Greek *prosōpon* (πρόσωπον) which was used without distinction for both face and mask. The dual capacity intimates a conception of self that is not restricted to a “person-centered prehension of person” and an understanding of reality that acknowledges the reciprocity between the seen and unseen. It portrays a society that had an entirely different perspective of reality, one poised on the cusp of two worlds: between.

The mask gives form to an authentic façade of reality that is ‘a visible sign rather than a concealing veil.’\(^{47}\) Nishitani’s percept of *persona* as the mask of person constitutes the ‘through and through real’ face or mask of absolute nothingness, rendering the thing called personality ‘in unison with absolute nothingness.’\(^{48}\) Even though personality is called a mask it is not some ‘temporary exterior that can be donned and doffed at will’ and moreover ‘It is the most real of realities. It comes into being only as a real form of human being that contains not the slightest bit of deception or artificiality.’\(^{49}\) If mask is thought of as something that conceals or even a thing or phenomenon at all, then it would mean something more real lies behind it. Nishitani goes to some lengths to clarify this point to the contrary, positing person as a phenomenon but not, in the terminology of Kant, as something distinct from the thing-in-itself. Instead both phenomenon and the thing-in-itself are subsumed by the infinite void, the field of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) a middle point, a mode of being, in which everything is encountered in its “true suchness.”\(^{50}\)

There is nothing more real than the outward manifestation, the similitude, the metaphor, and even though these are all appearances of reality, or even illusions, there is nothing else behind them or beyond them to make an appearance, as Nishitani emphatically advances; ‘Person is an appearance with nothing at all behind it to make an appearance. That is to say, “nothing at all” is what is behind person; complete nothingness, not one single thing, occupies the position behind person.’\(^{51}\)

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\(^{48}\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 71.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 69-72.

\(^{50}\) This term is used and explained throughout *Religion and Nothingness*. See for example pp. 21, 24, 34, 71, 71, 93-95, 106, 181-2, 192-96, 259-60. It is also explained a little more, further on this thesis.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 70.
Thus person is understood in terms of *persona* or *prosōpon* as the manifest form, the face or mask if you will, of absolute nothingness.

In just such a manner does the unseen world of Dominion of Ṣūfī mysticism have its similitudes in the world of visible form, but as with the mask of *persona*, nor are these to be disregarded as mere representation or as *something* which conceals something else, lest we fall into the myopic erring ways of the Bāṭanites, ‘God forbid! Nullifying the outward meanings is the view of the Bāṭanites, who have one blind eye and look only at one of the two worlds, not recognizing the parallel between the two or understanding its significance.’

The outward similitude becomes the ‘primal fact,’ the only possible evidence, the only perceivable evidence of life: ‘Goethe says that things that will pass are metaphors of the Eternal…yet so long as there is nothing like an eternal thing to serve as its archetype, the metaphor as such is the primal reality or fact. It is metaphor even as primal fact, and primal fact even as metaphor.’

The mask of *persona* marks out a form upon which the gaze can arrest, a horizon to orient the vision. However, it is not the destined arrival point, but more a landing from which to alight.

In the dramatic mask of fifth-century Attic theatre, most likely inherited from the cultural sphere of Dionysian ritual, we are given passage to another realm that is made visible through the very act of concealment ‘there was no secret reality behind the mask. Truth was made visible by the mask.’ Again, there is no other hidden reality or world or thing behind the mask, the mask unveiled truth through its positioning between worlds, by ‘a means of commingling human and spiritual worlds.’ The use of the mask in classical Greek tragedy gives form to this exchange between worlds, the reciprocal gaze of the inward and outward. The basic translation of *prosōpon* is “before the gaze.” The gaze in question though, is not clarified: it could equally be of the seer or the seen. Considering the meanings embedded within the term ‘mask’ that have been appropriated over time, and which are increasingly removed from the subtleties of ambiguous reciprocity that are inherent in the original, Wiles ponders the eventual title of *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202.

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Greek Tragedy and speculates that Fore-gaze and mimesis in Goat-Song at the Dionysia would perhaps have been less misleading. Certainly it would have at the very least hinted at the transformational powers invested in the mask of old and I suppose Fore and back gaze and mimesis etc. is a little clumsy.

The transformative powers of the mask help transcend the immediate earthly reality and open both wearer and spectator to other dimensions of reality. In this capacity the mask acts in the same way as a symbol which, according to Eliade, in ‘its multivalence, which is to say the multiplicity of meanings which it expresses simultaneously,’ is able to convey far more than any conceptual renderings of the structures of reality. The message of the symbol is to show us the ‘unity between the different levels of the real,’ a unity which, as Eliade petitions, we may find difficult to access rationally. The symbolic, like the mask worn in Dionysian ritual, can rekindle the frayed and torn connections that we have with our mythological past but more importantly with a sense of reality that embraces the paradoxical and coincidentia oppositorum.

1.2 Oblivion and Memory

The fire that fuels our memory is not the blazing saturation of a hexachromic panavision colour, washing out the blandness of neutrality and burning neural pathways of captivating melodrama. Memory is picturesque forgetting it is in the gaps and pauses between scene changes that the plot is developed. And the lost plot is the true keeper of memories makings. Forged in the foundry of Augé’s Oblivion, knowledge becomes forgetting, cast through the spaces left by the lack of remembrance, cire perdue of the mind. Like the mask of persona as the real appearance of absolute nothingness, the unknown, perhaps as the once known but now forgotten, is the only form through which we can identify our actual knowing.

In ‘his sublime essay Oblivion,’ Marc Augé inscribes another border that at once silences and gives voice to the unremitting din of memory (even in its vacancy it is garrulous) in the poignant image of land and seas meeting ‘Memories are crafted

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37 Ibid., 5-6.
38 In the justifiable opinion of James E. Young in his foreword to the essay Oblivion cited below, vii.
by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea.’\textsuperscript{59} Augé tenders oblivion, or loss of remembrance, as a contingency of memory rather than its opposition. He attests to a proximity of ‘two pairs – life and death, memory and oblivion’ which bring the content and meaning of each into reconsideration, in the same way that memory is conceived not opposed to oblivion, but formed by it. Without the space of forgetting the mind is left no navigable means to retrieve its memories.

The cartographic tracing of memoirs island floating in a vast sea of oblivion bears a resemblance to the first charted descriptions of our buoyant sphere, surrounded by the great “Bitter River” Okeanos. ‘In short,’ Augé declares, ‘oblivion is the life force of memory and remembrance is its product.’\textsuperscript{60} Oblivion - as proffered by Augé - not so distant cousin of Apeiron, seed of all remembrance and into which all memory ultimately falls is the “nothing at all” behind the mask of memory.

Beckett concedes a similar (‘if by some miracle of analogy’\textsuperscript{61}) contortion of participation and identification between immediate and past experiences in his erudite and “irascible” examination of the Proustian monster, Time. The ideal recollection cannot be willed, it comes upon one all of a sudden out of an unexpected sensation ‘whose integral purity has been retained because it has been forgotten.’\textsuperscript{62} In \textit{Genjōkōan}, one of the pivotal fascicles from his \textit{Shōbōgenzō}, Dōgen writes ‘To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self.’ When you ‘cast off one’s body and mind,’\textsuperscript{63} and ‘forget them both’\textsuperscript{64} you move into the reflection of forms and sounds, and hearing and seeing them for what they truly are, without any distance or distorting rarefactions you can fully perceive life and death and ‘this traceless enlightenment continues without end.’\textsuperscript{65} Joan Stambaugh references the same passage in her book \textit{Impermanence is Buddha-nature}, and emphasizes the crucial distance between Dōgen and a general tradition of mysticism by the active formulation of forgetting.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Dōgen, \textit{The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō}, 41.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 41.
Instead of union with the self through an internal search that encounters the divine within, Dōgen casts off the way of the Buddha, all others and his own sense of self in order to realize true Buddha-nature (his own suchness). This is a radical inversion of how we presume learning to be the accumulation of knowledge, here rather we have learning through forgetting, as Stambaugh writes in sympathy with this passage, ‘To learn is to forget.’

5. The Imaginal Spirit, Mystery and Mythos

Melting memories, melting worlds, slipping between the seen, between the seams, between the scenes and melting into unseen worlds.

As with the speculation on Anaximander’s τὸ ἀπειρον which relies on one extant fragment, historical evidence of classical Greek drama relies on fragments of another type, ceramic. Fortunately, according to Wiles, ‘fifth-century vase painting offers a rich source of data’ which means historians needn’t be contained to the ‘paltry antiquarian references’ of Horace and Aristotle. This doxography of the vases reveals a striking lack in representations of actual performance, the absence of which only heightens the intrigue surrounding early Greek tragedy. Wiles suggests the graphic privation can be read as a ‘tribute to the power of the theatrical imagination’ or perhaps ‘a religious taboo.’ More provoking though is his further conjecture that it is significant of different ‘ways of seeing.’ As the word prosōpon already infers, the ways of seeing in fifth-century Greece were not bound by the same divisions between an imaginary world and a perceived one that we are corralled within today. The point of crossing was not the well-guarded fence of...

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66 Which I suppose is why Stambaugh feels it’s necessary to differentiate between Dōgen and ‘any form of traditional “mysticism.”’ (As if it was some sort of a disease, the fear of which Nishida must have inherited, as he says he ‘capitulates to the enemy camp of mysticism’ in chagrined defeat after his supposedly failed efforts in Intuition.) Stambaugh does not clarify her position on exactly what mysticism is, nor particularly what aspect of it she distinguishes from Dōgen. I am presuming it is the contrast between union and forgetting as a type of dis-union.
67 Joan Stambaugh, Impermanence is Buddha-nature: Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 11. Related note on ‘cloud of forgetting’ from anonymous mystic writer of 15th century England – he beseeches we leave all thoughts, concepts, images and learning buried beneath this cloud of forgetting to rise up towards the cloud of unknowing, luminous transcendent nimbus of God.
68 Wiles, Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy, 15.
69 Ibid.
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science and rationalism under whose steely-eyed tunnel of vision we now (attempt to) frolic: an inheritance, ironically, of sixth and fifth-century Greece.

The most important pictorial evidence we have of the Athenian theatre is depicted on the Pronomos vase, named for the figure of Pronomos, a famous Theban composer, who is the central figure of one side of the vase, seated beneath Dionysos and Ariadne, playing his aulos. The vase appears to represent the entire chorus and cast of a satyr play along with the celebrated musician and Dionysos - theatres patron god - with his beloved Ariadne. What is most pronounced, according to Wiles, are the ‘multiple layers of reality’ that make up the scenes on the vase. Furthermore, any assessment of the performance must necessarily have its foundations in an understanding of these layers.

The term archaeologists use to describe the slippages between worlds, between the seer and the seen, evidenced in the use of the mask is ‘melting.’ The imagery conjured by this term alludes not only to the merging of face and mask, subject and object, but to the powers of Dionysian ritual and to the malleable form of the classical Greek world which itself is poised on the cusp of two worlds, the imaginary of mythos and the rationalized of logos. As we pass to the other side of the Pronomos vase, the side Wiles accuses theatre historians of omitting from their reviews, we encounter ‘no dividing line at the point where the mimetic world yields to the divine world.’ On another krater, now residing in the Vatican, the painter plays with the boundaries and connections between the human and supernatural and through the link of a maenadic figure creates a realm where ‘a Dionysiac world of the imagination merges with the observed world of mimesis and Athenian cult.’

In al-Ghazālī’s unfolding of the “mysteries of the divine lights,” imagination is given the similitude of glass which is taken from clay. The faculty of imagination, like its earthen counterpart, is considered dense and opaque, thus it ‘veils the mysteries and comes between you and the lights.’ It is not until it is refined and purified, presumably through the transformative principle of fire, that it becomes the glass through which the divine lights can penetrate. ‘Imagination, which provides the clay from which the similitude is taken, is solid and dense. It veils the mysteries and comes between you and the lights. But when the imagination is purified so that it

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70 Wiles, Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy, 30.
71 Ibid., 15.
72 Ibid., 32.
73 Ibid., 27.
becomes like clear glass, then it does not obstruct the lights…it preserves the light from being extinguished by violent winds.'\textsuperscript{74} Thus the melting of the densities of the imaginal spirit unveils, unmask, the lights and opens the way to understanding divine mystery.

The closing of this way incited a vituperate critique from al-Ghazālī, aimed particularly at Aristotle and Peripatetic philosophy, in \textit{The Incoherence of the Philosophers}. His attack was so successful that it entirely changed the course of development of Hellenistic philosophies within the lands of Islam. His major dissension with Peripatetic thought was its logical treatment of metaphysics. For al-Ghazālī the language of philosophy alone was simply not equipped or appropriate to deal with the ‘unseen reality of God and His relation to the universe.’\textsuperscript{75} The “violent winds” and ‘rough movements’\textsuperscript{76} that threaten to extinguish the light are the forceful exhalations of just such a philosophizing. The translucency of mystical reverie is painted out by the heavy hand of scientific rationalism, saturating the palette with colours of “exact conclusions.” Beckett would have undoubtedly agreed with al-Ghazālī, but instead of protecting the light from “violent winds” exerted his own ‘fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible’ and converts with great aplomb ‘afflatus into flatulence,’ as Richard Begam writes in his essay “Beckett and Postfoundationalism, or, How Fundamental are those Fundamental Sounds?”\textsuperscript{77}

Melting also suggests a loss or emptying of self, a \textit{kenōsis} or \textit{anātman}. Through a process of becoming, the actor is transformed by the mask and melts into it, surrendering any individuality. The mask, like the glass of al-Ghazālī’s similitude, does not obstruct the lights of the unseen world but allows them to penetrate, not through the translucency of the material, but through the transcendent act of the player. Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux describes the submission of the actor to the mask as a complete erasure of identity. The mask does not merely cover the face (identity) but ‘it abolishes and replaces it…beneath the dramatic mask, the face of the actor

\textsuperscript{74} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{The Niche of Lights}, 34.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., xxiii.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 40.
does not exist, and his individuality, as revealed by his own face, disappears and is replaced by that of the incarnated *personage.*\textsuperscript{78}

As a method of answering his own enquiry into the use of masks in ancient Greek theatre, Wiles poses a counter question as the best means of answering ‘why is it necessary for us *not* to wear masks in *our* theatre?’ The response to that question is loitering at the closure of the Way, in the “sempiternal penumbra” (thank you Beckett) of this shadowy half world whose light has been clouded by the solidity of certitude and knowing. The naked face of unique individuality that inhabits the stage of a pre-dominantly text-based contemporary theatre (Wiles particularly cites Shakespeare, Ibsen and Beckett) in a kind of neo-Cartesian order, is entirely antithetical to the function of the Greek mask.

According to Jean-Pierre Vernant the classical Greek was afforded the benefits of access to a world which was not yet ‘cut off from man by the unbridgeable divide which separates matter from spirit, the physical from the psychic,’\textsuperscript{79} or in the words of Wiles, a ‘non-Cartesian seeing.’\textsuperscript{80} Ultimately, in Wiles’s reckoning, the mask ‘transforms mental states’ and is a permeable boundary between ‘the world and the otherworld’\textsuperscript{81} acting as an ‘intermediary of inner and outer.’ In a final rebuke to the reading of Greek theatre, Wiles states, ‘Theatre historians must read against the grain of the philosophers if they are to reach that majority for whom reason was not the primary means of attaining truth. There was theory, and there was *theōria.*’\textsuperscript{82} *Theōria* (*θεωρία*), unlike the modern English word *theory* - which is however, derived from *theōria* - expresses “contemplation,” “looking at.” It houses ideas of the gaze, awareness, observation, being a spectator, and the experience that those observations and contemplations provoke. Understanding and awareness can either come through the eye of observation or the mind’s eye of contemplation. It has associations with the contemplative state of prayer in which we might come to know God.

As described by Al- Ghazālī, the “imaginal spirit” is what transforms objective knowledge into embodied meaning. What Ibn al-‘Arabī designates as the

\textsuperscript{78} Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy*, 256-7.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 252. Also Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992), 103-4.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 260.
‘Presence of Imagination,’ operates as an intermediary translator, an express conduit between the incomprehensible and our rational mind. It makes real what the mind cannot conceive of. Metaphorically, the imagination is presented ‘as a horn of light’ and transforms. William Chittick honours Henry Corbin for his pivotal development of the imagination through his mundus imaginalis and his bequeathment of the word “imaginal” to the Western intellectual tradition.

This goes someway to correcting the misadventure of Western philosophy dominated by the rational mind, which in Chittick’s reckoning, ‘Somewhere along the line…took a wrong turn.’ But ultimately, as far as Chittick is concerned, ‘it is as if Corbin was so entranced by the recovery of the imaginal that he had difficulty seeing beyond it,’ and so the critical point of tawḥīd – the ‘declaration of God’s Unity’ - central to the Islamic view is displaced by the primacy of the imaginal. In effect the fundamental purpose of the imaginal light is to point beyond itself, to illuminate the path away, to see through to the unity that is God. The merging point of the sensory and rational world’s where-in the magic of the imaginal spirit distils its essence is ‘called the Meeting Place of the Two Seas’ and in this basin of titanic proportions the imagination ‘embodies meanings and subtilizes the sensory thing.’

1.3 The Poetic

What is poetry but the siren’s song of the unknown. What voice but the poetic can lure the firm and verified into disequilibrium and hysteria. Poetry is the proud and humble home of the metaphor. Metaphor is the sweet ambrosia sustaining the incomprehensible feats of the mythic gods and the mythic gods are nothing if not pure poetry. The poetic is a non-exchangeable private currency without fixed rates. It is indeterminable and subject to infinite fluctuations of value. The apeiron is divinely poetic, it eludes everything, even itself, for it is uncontainable and as an Infinite, inherently unknowable. Perhaps as with certain untranslatable modes of transmission, understanding the apeiron would be to meet with it half way, to participate somehow in an engaged exchange. This meeting could never be known by

84 Chittick opens his exhaustive study of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s metaphysics of the imagination with the frank statement ‘Somewhere along the line, the Western intellectual tradition took a wrong turn.’ ix
85 Ibid., x.
86 Ibid., 123.
or communicated to anything outside of it, not without calamitous distortion, deflation, disbelief, dangerous bewilderment or exaggeration. Such is the incommensurable omnipotence of an unknowable and indefinable force such as the apeiron.

The arcane and alluring *apeiron* has been taken to mean “boundless,” “infinite,” “indefinite,” “without limit,” “unlimited” or “limitless,” also, ‘ungenerated as well as imperishable,’\(^{87}\) ‘that which is internally unbounded, without internal distinctions,’\(^{88}\) and ‘non-traversable, or inexhaustible.’\(^{89}\) This does not conclude the eulogy (or indictment, depending on one’s preferences; something or nothing?). But once the word took on a philosophical appellation within the newly developing cosmology ‘the original meaning disappears from sight.’\(^{90}\) As ‘the only two witnesses whose voice deserves a hearing’ yet whose views are ‘so dependent on their own conceptual scheme’\(^{91}\) Kahn for one ventures outside the doxographic tradition to see what proffers can be gleaned from early Greek literature on the scope and source of this great term (the search of the source of the source for all…tilting at windmills?)

It is presumed that ἄπειρος (*apeiros*) is derived from the noun πέρας (*peras*) typically understood as “limit” and therefore with α- privative it logically becomes “limitless” or ‘devoid of limits, boundless.’\(^{92}\) Yet in the Homeric corpus the ἄπειρος (*apeiros*) expresses a vastness and unsurpassable immensity whilst characteristically equated with earth and sea, neither of which can be thought of as without limits. Though, with a given propensity for inconsistencies the poetic voice was at liberty to contradict (or reveal the paradox) and so the earth of shores and edges could well become “boundless” and “limitless.” As opposed to the “muddling and meddling of minds” that I earlier suggested might reasonably be held responsible for scholarly agonistics surrounding the *apeiron*,\(^{93}\) I rather believe it is the unqualifiable poetry of

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87 Kahn, *Anaximander*, 238.
89 Kahn, *Anaximander*, 237.
91 Kahn, *Anaximander*, 11 and 231.
92 Ibid., 231.
93 Along with seemingly random acts of natural fate i.e.: the hungry path of a beetle, an unseasonal period of humidity or, ‘the most wretched accidents, sudden eclipses of men’s minds, superstitious paroxysms and antipathies, cramped or lazy fingers, down to book worms and rainfall, all determine whether or not a book will live another century or turn into ashes and mould.’ See Friedrich
the concept that is the cause of such unyielding dissention – though it must be conceded, with a declaration like that of Krauss’s, certain covenants have been sealed. If the concept is expressed “in rather poetical terms” as Simplicius seems to think then it follows that through the same terms, the poetical, meaning might be revealed.

The acumen of the new scientific speculation emerging in Miletus - and from which arose the rationalist methods of logic that were to become the foundations of the Western philosophical canon - is precisely what led the Ionian enterprise astray from the spiritual principles that characterise what has come to be known as the ‘Axial Age’ of which the ancient Greeks were of significant import. The so named ‘Axial Age’, coined by Karl Jaspers, identifies a period in history from 800 to 200 BC in which a striking synchronicity occurs in the developments of three otherwise isolated regions: China, India and in the west, Hellas and the Near East. Jasper describes ‘the enigma of the occurrence’ as being nothing short of ‘the nature of a miracle.’ It is a period in which suddenly ‘Being becomes sensible to man, but not with finality: the question remains.’ This question can perhaps only be answered by maintaining a balance and connection between the origins and destinations of the inquiry.

With such a perspective in mind, the historical diversion back into the mythopoeic that Kahn initiates is at once befitting to the concept of *apeiron* and possibly more revealing than the brilliant trajectory of the new natural philosophy that shone forth from the ‘jewel of Ionia.’ Not only is it more befitting, but as ‘the idea of Greek rationalism suddenly bursting forth from sixth-century Ionia, like Athena from the brain of Zeus, is one of those historical naïvetés which are no longer very much in fashion’ it seems a prudent measure to cross the great Styx and search the shadowy dominion of the departed for lost evidence. The *apeiron* is as much a matter of poetic and symbolic representation as a scientific solution or premise. The poetic antecedents of the burgeoning Ionian cosmology were still sensitive to an unseen world, a world which has its parallels with the later Şüfi

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95 Ibid., 3.


97 Kahn, *Anaximander*, 133.
equivalent of Dominion, as expounded by al-Ghazālī. This world necessitates the use of parable, analogy, myth and symbolism to adumbrate its flighty spectre for it is in fact inconceivable through direct concrete means; it simply ceases to exist under the unsustainable pressures of such conditions.

The mythopoeic conception of the world is an express acknowledgment and mode of response that concedes the unknowable and ineffable. Wittgenstein’s well-known exhortation to leave aside explanation for description alone, ‘all explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place’ is in its own context of language pictures, a continuing acknowledgment of what lies outside language ‘whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’. The construction of meaning through language pictures functions in a manner akin to the epic and mythological narrative. A space is tendered; there prevails a gap of malleable indeterminacy, an overlap, a seam allowance for co-existent realities that do not attempt to contrive “exact conclusions.”

6. Gaps and Openings: Ruptures and Reconnections

No leap can be taken without trust. Yet trust is a leap itself. In the delicate interstices between meanings, invisible bridges are hatched that bear the faithful leaper across the “narrow passages of nothingness.”

In Real Presences George Steiner heralds the opening of another gap with the erosion of the ‘Hebraic-Hellenic-Cartesian’ tradition that housed itself in Logos. He inaugurates the entering ‘upon a second major phase’ which submits to a ‘real absence’ in the articulations of logic and communicable knowing. This second phase, what he calls the time of the epilogue, necessarily comes ‘after the Word’ and exercises a new, or, if I may suggest, a rekindled, authority over the sovereignty of semantic order. The preceding phase - that of declamatory Logos - had its inception with the propositional utterances of the pre-Socratics and continued with its enunciatory trajectory until now. Or, quite specifically, until the years of the 1870s to the 1930s in Russia and Western and Central Europe, in which period, Steiner

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99 Ibid., 89, apophthegm 7.
believes we witness the fissure of trust hither-to-fore invested in nomination and predication, ‘*this break of the covenant between word and world.*’

It is not often such seismic movement erupts in the core of man, if it did we would have been left floating, disconnected and adrift from our historical moorings without recourse to anchor. According to Steiner it is writing that traces the providential line of continuity between the remote past and our present latitudes, giving intelligible sustenance to the connective tissues of our remembrance and being in the world. Through these delicate webs of scriptive capture we are able to ‘cite archaic myths as somehow elemental to our own constellations of consciousness.’ However, the bond of trust between word and world is but a trailing thread on the vestigial goat track (byway of the archaic ‘language-animal’) frayed and worn by the impossible burden of bringing ‘home to sensory verification and to intelligibility the elusive quarry of existence.’

One flag bearer of the ensuing opus magnum, the first phase of *Logos*, was Anaximander with his ‘riddling dictum,’ to use the epithet of Steiner. The “dictum” he refers to is the extant fragment of Anaximander, and the book from which it would have been derived is claimed to be some of the first Greek prose. Though to be consistent, this assertion has not been immune to the usual attestations and challenges that accompany the ancient Greek texts. Theopompus amongst other authorities of old regards Pherecydes as the author of such a due. Karl Jaspers however, is one who begs to differ and in blandiloquent approbation confirms Anaximander as quite a revolutionary figure:

he was also the first thinker to develop, in concepts, a metaphysical vision transcending all sense perception; the first to give the name of the Divine to what is achieved in the fundamental thinking that transcends all that exists, or in other words, to find the divine with the help of thought, instead of accepting it as a given in traditional religious conceptions. He was the first

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100 George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1989), 93.
101 Ibid., 87.
102 Ibid., 91.
103 Ibid., 89.
Greek to find in prose the appropriate form in which to communicate such insights.\footnote{105}

Patent in Jasper’s résumé is the founding pledge of trust that Steiner instaurates between world and word, before language ‘withered to inert routine and cliche,’\footnote{106} in a time when ‘Logos and cosmos met.’\footnote{107} Anaximander’s prose may have been harbinger to the ultimate rupture of confidence but that was a far cry from the force of its revelation in its nascent setting. The “real presence” at the centre of Steiner’s now broken contract between world and word is, in short, a ‘wager on transcendence.’\footnote{108}

Watt’s sidewalk swagger, earlier exposed, is a more prosaic but no less significant expression of this “wager on transcendence,” a true leap of faith, with every single step.

Undoubtedly the first tectonic rumblings portentous of the eruption to come surfaced with the Milesians. And perhaps the volcanic force of Anaximander’s philosophy did generate the ‘tidal wave’ of ‘acta and dissertations’\footnote{109} consequent to the initial murmurs, but behind that great (and destructive?) wave, Olympus towers, majestic and undisturbed for all to see, if we would but look up a little.

Distance, in time and space, is sometimes the best form of perspective, and perhaps being in possession of both of those, perspective and distance, in time and space what’s more, is what bestows Nishitani Keiji with his particular vista that is able to shepherd the competing elements of mythos, logos, philosophy, the intellect and “scientism” into a harmonious and interconnected dimension of Existenz. This comprehensive distillation is worth quoting at length:

> Even when philosophy first came to being as a logos or “science” (though opinion is divided on this question), it did so as a demythification – or, if you will, a logification – of the mythical world view in which it, nonetheless, remained firmly rooted. We may even go so far as to say that the underlying root of the mythos hidden deep beneath Greek philosophy has remained intact throughout the whole of its development, and that this accounts in part for the

\footnote{106} Steiner, \textit{Real Presences}, 97.
\footnote{107} Ibid., 90.
\footnote{108} Ibid., 4.
\footnote{109} Ibid., 24.
depth and richness of its *logos*. While it may be called a *demythification* of the mythical through the logical, it was not a pure and simple negation of the mythical. That sort of negation begins with the standpoint of science proper, or rather, “scientism.” Science grasps the mythical on the dimension of its outer shell of representations, which it banishes as unscientific. Philosophy, for its part, recognizes in the same representations symbols of *logos* which it then restores to the dimension of *logos*.

But neither the negation of myth by scientific intellect nor its transmutation into *logos* by philosophic intellect can exhaust the essence within myth. The mythical has to be restored to the existential whence it originates in an elemental sense and within which the core of the content of its meaning can be accorded anew an existential interpretation on the dimension of *Existenz*.

The timeless protagonist and narrator of Calvino’s *Cosmicomics*, Qfwfq, has his own eureka moment in the bathtub of ‘torrid soup of infinite heat’ at the inceptive moments of our exploding universe when it was nought more than ‘an infinitesimal pimple in the smoothness of nothing.’ Like a gigantic kinetic pendulum he ricochets from one extreme to the other in an arabesque of dazzling flexibility, quite unprecedented and full of potentiality, but through the sheer unbridled enthusiasm of the venture exposes the very weaknesses of character he wished to conceal, his ‘ingenuous, mindless’ and thoroughly ‘greenhorn’ behaviour.

He was something between a baryon and a quark at the time, so “greenhorn” behaviour is begrudgingly permissible. In the excited flurry of development that ensued after the creation of time and being, of which our blazing star was part, Qfwfq was afforded a momentary “opening” through which his great revelation poured:

so began a time when it was only in the chinks of emptiness, the absences, the silences, the gaps, the missing connections, the flaws in time’s fabric, that I could find meaning and value. Through those chinks I would sneak glances at the great realm of non-being, recognising it now as my only true home…I would slither into these narrow passages of nothingness that crossed the

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112 Ibid., 379.
compactness of the universe; together we would achieve the obliteration of every dimension, of all time, all substance, all form.¹¹³

Qfwfq’s recognition of his true homeground as nothingness is a strikingly Buddhist perspective. The restoration of meaning to his new found being, but only through the chinks and absences that reveal this “true home,” sets up the dynamic of his relationship as a particular particle with the universal universe. These interstices of inordinate significance are also indicated in Nishida’s self-determining cosmic structure. It is precisely by virtue of these gaps that meaning is instituted. As Nishida writes in his treatise Basho; ‘But insofar as there is a gap between the universal that subsumes and the particular that is subsumed, a relationship between thing and quality is established.’¹¹⁴

Out of this gap meaning is formed as much by what is absent as what is present. In the wake of Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) *différance* Terry Eagleton takes up the sparks and flickers of the temporal processes of language and awaits the meaning that might someday, somehow, emerge from the absences between them; ‘When I read a sentence, the meaning of it is always somehow suspended, something deferred or still to come…and although the sentence may come to an end the process of language itself does not.’¹¹⁵ This flickering of absence and presence renders the fullness of the sign untraceable, sublimely elusive; ‘meaning is not immediately present in a sign. Since the meaning of a sign is a matter of what the sign is not, its meaning is always in some sense absent from it too.’¹¹⁶

### 6.1 Charting Absences in the Land of Logos

*A proliferation of marks, dashes, outlines, spots and smudges on the chartered page mirrors the same collection of streaks and blotches accruing in the atlas of an inquiring mind. The result is a massive island of debris, littered with darkening sure lines, layer upon layer, washed up by the rising tide of factum and datum. But no

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¹¹⁶ Ibid.
matter the depth or height of this shoreline rubble the horizon ever beckons and its bewitching call, which is not recorded anywhere, makes light of all, even the darkest of the surest of lines.

Anaximander is also recorded by the geographer Agathemerus (c. third century) to be ‘the first to depict the inhabited earth on a chart.’\textsuperscript{117} Here again the assertion of knowledge, the literal demarcation of that knowledge upon the page, would seem to fill in and in effect, wipe-out the translucency of the tentative, the mythological. Hyperborea, land of eternal light in the beyond, takes its more legitimate snowy and sandy form.\textsuperscript{118} Certainly, one assumes, if nothing else, then the solidity and clarity of a line, whether the borderline of a territorial demarcation or the cursive mark of alphabeta characters, would dissuade the imagination from its more distant wanderings and quell the pyrotechnics of our Olympian antecedents. Yet paradoxically, the security of such docking gives the assurance of possible return and whole new fathoms are covered. Albeit of a more tellurian order which has seen the diminished flame of otherworldly attributes.

An exquisite rendering of this anomaly would be the superbly crafted book, \textit{Atlas of Remote Islands; Fifty Islands I have not visited and never will}, whose own cartographic explorations stem from a poetic imagination par excellence. ‘Give me an atlas over a guidebook any day,’ declares the author Judith Schalansky, ‘There is no more poetic book in the world.’\textsuperscript{119} The sublime images of Schalansky’s fifty small islands surrounded and separated by immense oceanic expanses give visible form to Augé’s sea of oblivion crafting the shoreline of memory. Maps offer us the world through their every failure to do so. It is an offering of absences. Their potency and meaning comes from the gaps which we are obliged, offered, to fill.

As with the prodigious and exhaustive memory of Funes ‘el memorioso’ of Jorge Luis Borges, whose incomprehensible comprehensiveness left him without any understanding what-so-ever for there was no space left for the discovery of realisation. Just like the vital potency of Augé’s oblivion which authorizes the retrieval of memories, it is in the spaces of forgetting, the absences and lacunae that

\textsuperscript{117} Kahn, \textit{Anaximander}, 82.
\textsuperscript{118} See Peter Kingsley, \textit{A Story Waiting to Pierce You: Mongolia, Tibet and the Destiny of the Western World} (California: Golden Sufi Center, 2011).
meaning is made. As Terry Eagleton points out, ‘meaning is not immediately present in a sign. Since the meaning of a sign is a matter of what the sigh is not, its meaning is always in some sense absent from it too.'120 Absences within the sign and within the mind maintain in permanent reserve a place of invitation for contemplation. Nietzsche may have been the inspiration for Borges and his legendary Funes with this pointed maxim; ‘Many a man fails to become a thinker for the sole reason that his memory is too good.’121

The recognition of a “real absence” striking camp in the otherwise busy portico that ushers through interpreters, scholars, astronomers, camels and gift bearing mendicants (the most valued and rarest of visitors), between word and world is one of the momentous turns and compelling reasons identified by Steiner, as to why ‘Western consciousness…moves house.’122 Steiner cites the work of Mallarmé and Rimbaud as early warning signs of the general egress in motion, ‘This move is first declared in Mallarmé’s disjunction of language from external reference and in Rimbaud’s deconstruction of the first person singular.’123 The central résistance of this tour de force is against the ‘mendacious and utilitarian contract’124 that invests the word with such ultimate and supreme authority that it is taken for truth, reality and the very thing-in-itself. This contract must be broken to reinstate the numinous freedom of language through ‘the arc of metaphor,’125 where the lion can again roar and defecate in the ‘reticulative unboundedness of its lexical-grammatical universe.’126 Reason is founded on the structural edifice of logos and has been so effective and convincing in its construction of meaning that the real purpose of its venture has been eclipsed by the obfuscating shadow cast from its colossal façade.

In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant’s systematic explication of the possibilities and talents of reasons perspicacious capacities does not avoid the measure of its limits either. ‘Reason,’ Kant reasons, ‘has an immediate relation to the use of understanding…but solely for the purpose of directing it to a certain unity, of

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120 Eagleton, Literary Theory, 111.
122 Steiner, Real Presences, 107.
123 Ibid., 94.
124 Ibid., 98.
125 Ibid., 176.
126 Ibid., 98.
which the understanding has no conception.’\textsuperscript{127} The nebulous realm of “no conception” conducts its affairs through the intermediary messengers of metaphor, similitude, poetry, parable and myth, and the odd map.

The first modern atlas, appearing in 1570, was curiously titled \textit{Theatrum Orbis Terrarum} (Theatre of the World) or otherwise referred to as the Ortelius Atlas, after its Antwerpian compiler: scholar and geographer Abraham Ortelius. The world as the stage upon which the dénouement of the Gods’ wills and wrathes are played out was not a theme uncommon of the times. In nearby Spain (whose King Felipe II Ortelius had been appointed to as geographer, and whom was acknowledged with a dedication in the \textit{Theatrum Orbis Terrarum}) a generation later, Pedro Calderón de la Barca y Barreda González de Henao Ruiz de Blasco y Riaño, more often referred to as Pedro Calderón de la Barca, reasons unknown, wrote \textit{El Gran Teatro del Mundo} (The Great Theatre of the World), one of the many Sacramental plays that he dedicated the latter part of his life to writing. The mythological cannot be ignored in either of these titular suppositions. Certainly a heritage of mythology is more evident in theatre than cartography, but if we look to the edges of Ortelius’s original 1570 edition of \textit{Typus Orbis Terrarum} (Map of the World) there swirl the vaporous forms of current or cumuli, Olympus or Oceanus.

These early engravings surely inspired the aesthetic elegance of Schalansky’s pared back topographies and share with her the paradoxical spirit of an unsung poetic longing and an empirical structural control that manifests itself in scientific endeavour and an appeal to perfectionism. There are no surviving records of Anaximander’s first charts of the earth and sea, so we are at liberty to unleash the imaginary – apart from the sobering fact or ‘lucky coincidence’ of a Mesopotamian counterpart in the collection of the British Museum which curtails any extravagant chimeras. What we can assume is that the quiffs and spume that cornice the edges of the \textit{Typus Orbis Terrarum} would be augmented to a statement of some significance as the hallowed “Bitter River” that flows around our small blue green planet, that would then provoke the mirth of Herodotus ‘I laugh at the sight of the earth charts which many have drawn up in the past, and which no one has explained in a way that makes any sense. They picture Ocean flowing round about the earth, which is

circular as if drawn with a compass. The “Bitter River” circumnavigating the intrepid expeditions of the first explorers thus delineates the boundaries of their imaginations.

Herodotus was a founding member of the house of *Logos* and his mirth might well have been subdued to witness the rupture invoked by Mallarmé (through the hermeneutics and philology of Steiner) between any external referent and its lexical representation. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) honours Herodotus as ‘the first storyteller of the Greeks.’ The only known work of Herodotus *The Histories* or *The History* or *The Inquiry*, as it is variably translated, is, as the title suggests, meant as an inquiry and account of events leading to and creating the Greco-Persian wars. All stories are histories of a kind, and the less invested in ‘the dissemination of information’ or ‘psychological connection’ of a tale, the more likely it is able to continuously release its meaning over time. For Benjamin, it is the dryness and impartiality of Herodotus that assures his narratives the longevity of impact that a real storyteller has. Like Wittgenstein, Benjamin seeks an unrestricted meaning not coloured or crafted through the defensive network of explicatory negotiations, but rather meaning that arises through receptive encounter:

Herodotus offers no explanations. His report is the driest. That is why this story from ancient Egypt is still capable after thousands of years of arousing astonishment and thoughtfulness. It resembles the seeds of grain which have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids shut up air-tight and gave retained their germinative power to this day.

As the ‘best canon of the Ionic speech,’ his prose is distinctively marked by the poetic language of the epic and tragic writers before him. Graham describes it as ‘peripatetic story telling’ and ascribes Herodotus’s conceptual world in which he applied his own theories to events and often in contradiction to the prevailing view, as very much an effect of the Ionian cosmologists.

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128 Kahn, *Anaximander*, 83.
130 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 90.
Of the Ionians, Heraclitus presents *Logos* not so much as a rational Word order from which all reason flows, but as a cosmic world order, that is unifying and transformative. Configured in relation to the subject as it experiences and changes in confrontation with the world Graham conceives *Logos* as a dynamic relationship rather than a fixed principle, ‘To put it otherwise, our soul has its own Logos that governs its interaction with the world. It is a Logos that increases itself.’ Had this ‘unseen but ever-present’ discourse of world and soul penetrated to the furthest depths of the “lexical-grammatical universe” the rupture in the covenant between word and world would ostensibly be rendered void. This interruption was made necessary for the precise reason that a discontinuity, a hiatus of communion *had already occurred*. In a silent appeal to the disjunctive factionalism at play in the house of *Logos* we are ushered into the ‘spacings, lacunae, fissures and breaks’ of writing, that not only signify the estrangement of word from meaning but simultaneously hold and nurture the dormant seeds awaiting precipitous conditions to release their germinative power and create whole new networks of roots and stems upon which to build a “lexical-grammatical universe.” The indeterminate passage to yonder shore is marked out by these ‘white abysses of silent nothingness.’

Rimbaud and Mallarmé also appear in Blanchot’s *The Death of the Last Writer* like ephemeral book ends to an ‘imaginary Tibet’ rent of its holy signs. Blanchot conjures the illusory death of the last writer, a mythical ‘Rimbaud-like character,’ invoking the ceaseless murmur of a non-speaking speech which only writing can silence. The writing though, must arise out of the very same vertiginous abyss that broke the line of thought and separated off its parts into unintelligible idiom. Embarking upon an epic odyssey for ‘the unlimited creativity of metaphor which is inherent in the origins of all speech’ and which can bring back to awareness the unsayable utterances sounding their sonorous musings from the gaps, now, finally, ‘we are at sea, uncompassed.’

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133 Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos*, 134.
134 Steiner, *Real Presences*, 122.
136 Steiner, *Real Presences*, 104.
7. The Sea

Endless unfathomable depths. More than metaphor or symbol, the sea is a living similitude of the unknown. The rudimentary offering made here is but a blip in the ocean of inferences that make the sea (or ocean) the most appropriately and infinitely symbolic vessel for so many of the ideas I am associating with the Unknown. The apeiron, the poetic, the infinite, abysses, voids, unchartered ways, chartered ways, evanescent horizons, light refracting Fata Morganas, plunges, floating, uncertain wreckage and ruin, hierophanous epiphany, epic exploratory risks, unimaginable worlds on distant shores, nirvāṇa of yonder shore, numinous invocation, lost, and found uncompassed.

The sea harbours a rich bounty of analogies and has the depth, mysteriousness, expansiveness and activity – both inherent and acquired – to absorb and spew forth all manner of revelation. Kahn found in the epic literature of Homer and in the metaphoric language of the mythopoeic, imagery befitting and significant of the boundless and indefinite apeiron, ‘The ἀπειρόν of Anaximander…has the epithet (and the majesty) which Earth and Sea possess for Homer.’ Drawing on the archaic poets, predecessors to the Ionian cosmologists, not only provides important and subtle insights into the transferences and metamorphosis of meanings that accompany the apeiron, but also keeps alive the tenuous tracings of languages potential “to invoke the numinous.” The immensity and elusiveness of the apeiron cannot be understood without the buoyant effects of lyrical suggestion, it is not an explainable idea, it falls into the domain of Wittgenstein’s gnomic order “all explanation must disappear, and description alone must take its place.” The apeiron “steers all” like a universal rudder guiding its prodigious fleet through Sea, Earth, Tartarus, Heaven, Air, Aither and even Fire.

Nearly two millennia after Anaximander’s reason baffling apeiron surrounded our known world Cusanus set sail from Greece and was touched by the effulgent rays of divine inspiration which were to illuminate his path of theological and philosophical inquiry for the remainder of his life’s speculative voyage: ‘Attainment, however, was denied me until I was returning by sea from Greece,

137 Kahn, Anaximander, 233.
when, by what I believe was a supreme gift of the Father of Lights from Whom is every perfect gift, I was led in the learning that is ignorance to grasp the incomprehensible.'\textsuperscript{138}

Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle rides the crests and surges of the allegorical ‘wave of the Intellect,’\textsuperscript{139} in rhetorical demonstration of the maritime themes and oceanic metaphors often evoked to express the internal tides of the metaphysical quest. Boyle traces the sea as a hierophanous site in western culture back to Greek mythology with the coupling of the Titan Ōkeanós and his sister Tethys who ‘were the parents of coming-to-be’\textsuperscript{140} according to Aristotle’s account and in Homer ‘Okeanos begetter of gods and mother Tethys’ or simply ‘begetter of all.’ In Plato’s \textit{Cratylus} and \textit{Timaeus} there are suggestions that the cosmogonical importance of Ōkeanós dates back to Orphic poetry ‘Orpheus, too, says somewhere that “Fair-streamed Okeanos first began the marriages, who wed Tethys, his sister by the same mother”,’ and also ‘we must believe those who formerly gave utterance, those who were, as they said, offspring of the gods, and must, I suppose, have truly known their own ancestors…Okeanos and Tethys were born as children of Ge [earth] and Ouranos [sky].’\textsuperscript{141}

From this hydrous and poetic \textit{fons et origo} the sea has continued to expand horizons through symbolic and allegorical metaphor. Indeed Boyle contends that it is primarily the symbolic ‘potency of the sea to invoke the numinous’\textsuperscript{142} that is the real motive behind Cusanus’s testimony of his seaborne epiphany, although, she does concede that the seventy-four day journey from Constantinople to Venice could have allowed ‘Cusanus the leisure for profound speculation’\textsuperscript{143} inductive of the revelations such as his. The sea, as with the infinite, each being a representative epithet of the other, is not immune to negative charges typically (in the West) associated with the void, the indefinite and the unknown. As Boyle points out, even in the modern idiom to be “at sea” indicates ignorance, confusion, lostness and uncertainty. She cites Plato (427-347 B.C.), Plotinus (204-270) and Augustine (354-430) amongst those

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kirk and Raven, \textit{The Presocratic Philosophers}, 17. Kirk is quoting from Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics}.
\item Ibid., 17-18.
\item Boyle, ‘Cusanus at Sea,’ 184. Boyle is quoting Plotinus here.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize
who have used the maritime metaphor to help describe difficulties, perplexities and even evil: ‘Plato had imagined evil matter as the sea, the abyss of dissimilitude through which God steers as limbs abraded and mutilated by the waves.’

In *The sea as a place of no return in ancient Greece*, Astrid Lindenlauf focuses on a scene from a Boeotian black-figure skyphos (bowl like drinking vessel from Thebes fourth-fifth century B.C.) which draws attention to ‘a whole range of characteristics that the ancient Greeks attributed to the sea,’ not least of which being ‘its dangerous, savage and corrupting nature when whipped into a roiling turbulence by storms like Boreas’ (Boreas being the God of the cold north wind, hence “Hyperborea”). Lindenlauf also recalls the image of frogs around a pond given by Plato in *Phaedo* to describe the pattern of Greek colonisation on the shores of the Mediterranean. This infamous circle of squatting amphibians (perhaps inspired by the apparently awkward figure of Socrates or maybe it was an early insight into our evolutionary history as a biological species) ‘highlights that the sea was an integral part of ancient Greek life and a mediating and unifying agent.’ The archaic concept of the great river Ōkeanós at the world’s edge is converted to the sea at the centre, upon whose edge is perched the founding settlements of Western (un)civilisation.

Undoubtedly these great aqueous abysses were honoured, feared even, for their potency to “invoke the numinous,” and in a dynamic reminiscent of the relationship perceived between the Gods and mortal man, were ‘thought to be benevolent yet also terrible.’ Appropriating terms used in modern waste management Lindenlauf’s argument ultimately testifies to the ancient Greek perception of the sea as what she calls ‘a place of no return’ and an ‘away-place.’ The sea from this perspective takes on a marginal and dubious character that has direct associations ‘with darkness, death and the abyss of Hades,’ so many abysses.

144 Boyle, ‘Cusanus at Sea,’ 184.
146 Lindenlauf, *The sea as a place of no return in ancient Greece*, 417. I would also like to add a very insightful and leading comment here made by Professor Eugenio Benitez with respect to the significance of “amphibian” as a ‘a life form that can exist in both realms – the noumenal and the phenomenal.’
147 Ibid., 418-9.
148 Ibid.
And let us not neglect Nietzsche’s infamous abyss which returns our gaze and engulfs us with its monstrousness. In a paradoxical trans-descendence to a ‘sorrowful, black sea,’ that from his mountain summit Zarathustra must go down to, the sea is represented as yet another great abyss, as a place of darkness but yet also as the ultimate summit of enlightenment; ‘Ah, this sorrowful, black sea beneath me! Ah, this brooding reluctance! Ah, destiny and sea! Now I have to go down to you!’ For it is only in penetrating to the depths of his pain and unknowing that Zarathustra will be freed of himself and look beyond and above to encounter his real Self. ‘Summit and abyss – they are now united in one!’ The greatest heights can only come from the greatest depths.

7.1 The Infinite Yonder Shore

When the infinite, which carries within it such immense distance, can be conceived right here in the smallest ripple upon an endless sea, when it is brought home by the tiniest of gestures then have we met the truly infinite and can revel in its sublimity. In this meeting infinity is no longer a negation of the finite but an awakening to the infinite within the finite, to an “absolute near side” and a conversion from nihility which is true finitude to śūnyatā as true infinity.

Yet not all experiences of the seemingly limitless infinitude of the sea that leaves us oscillating “uncompassed” in a void of unknowing are met with despair or hesitation. Vertiginous liberation is also a sentiment corollary to an experience or conception of vastness. Giacomo Leopardi’s poem L’Infinito marries the otherwise mismatched motifs of sweet ease and certain ruin in the final image of his hillside reverie ‘E il naufragar m’è dolce in questo mare’ (And sweet to me is shipwreck on this sea). Drowning in the boundless immensity that only the imaginal spirit can elicit Leopardi blissfully acquiesces to the incomprehensible. Not afloat, but asunder – the infinite sea of eternity overwhelming and quelling the quotidian rustlings of

149 ‘Anyone who fights with monsters should take care that he does not in the process become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back into you.’ good and evil 68 cf ‘the mind of the Tathāgata projects into the mind of man, and the mind of man projects into the mind of the Tathāgata.’ Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 179.
151 Ibid., 173.
times present. Leopardi’s conceded shipwreck, inspired by the contemplation of an obscured horizon, bespeaks a marked rapport with the nirvāṇa of Zen Buddhism, expressed by Nishitani as the ‘attainment of “yonder shore”’ beyond the fathomless sea of suffering.\footnote{Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 174.} Nirvāṇa is understood as the true transcendence into emptiness and it is only arrived at through an existential confrontation with nihility. Nihility is experienced as what Nishitani dubs ‘bad existential infinity’ which recalls the “bad faith” of Sartre.\footnote{Nishitani distinguishes emphatically between true transcendence and transcendence into nihility as a kind of bad infinity which would be like Sartre’s bad faith. Ibid., 179.} The trick to liberation here is in understanding the interconnectedness of suffering and bliss. Suffering is the delusional ignorance of samsāra (birth-and-death) bliss is emancipation from this cycle. As a standpoint in Mahāyāna teachings it is called ‘samsāra-sive-nirvāṇa’ or ‘non-abiding in nirvāṇa.’\footnote{Ibid., 177-8.} What this standpoint expresses is very much like what Nietzsche expresses through Zarathustra’s “trans-descendence” to his abyssal summit, if I may call it that. It is a breaking through to yonder shore by breaking out of the infinite cycle of birth-and-death, by ‘dying to this “life” of birth-and-death.’\footnote{Ibid., 176.} In his final analysis Nishitani insists that infinity must truly become part of the very living of life itself ‘To take possession of infinity is for infinity to become reality as life; for it to be really lived.’\footnote{Ibid., 177.}

Amidst hedgerow and leafy ululations Leopardi succumbs to a sublime rural felicity that confronts the terrified voice of mortality and in so doing is liberated from it and released into the quietude of eternity. This is samsāra-sive-nirvāṇa rendered lyrical upon a hill, a conversion of the monstrous abyss into the agape of infinity. The sea through all its mercurial (in every sense of the word – capricious, fluid, changeable, volatile, unpredictable, lively etc. - and not least being the association of trade and travel that comes with the messenger god Mercury) incarnations, maintains a constant affinity with infinity. To enumerate the poetic and symbolic resonances of the sea and how this fathomless archetypal “abyss” (why not another) has protected, procured, betrayed and destroyed life: disoriented, enlightened, born afloat and inspired ideas: bewitched, bemused, befuddled and so on and so forth is itself, in short, an infinite and fathomless enterprise, or, to use the
words of al-Ghazālī, most apropos here, ‘this discussion is an ocean without shore.’

8. The Evil Good Infinite

A picture, unexpectedly encountered, not framed by the usual squaring off at the edges, but which continues past its limited configurations to suddenly become quite another, its other. The infinite does not exist, it has no reality, and yet reality cannot be contained to the finite either. These two oppositions are entangled in a self-determining and self-effacing embrace whispering promises of freedom and security one to the other.

Paolo Zellini begins A Brief History of Infinity with the words of Borges ‘One concept corrupts and confuses others. I am not speaking of the Evil whose limited sphere is ethics; I am speaking of the infinite.’ This quote is taken from Borges’s condensed form of his own ‘illusory Biography of the Infinite,’ which for reasons alluded to but never clarified, resulted instead in the short essay Avatars of the Tortoise. In this brief “biography” he enumerates various uses of the formulaic regressus in infinitum to verify with equal success both ways, the existence and non-existence of a thing. To this end he confirms ‘the vertiginous regressus in infinitum can perhaps be applied to all subjects.’ The idea of the reduction of all subjects through the infinite application of an infinitely repeating factor to an infinite could also be a very vertiginous and therefore apt configuration of the Unknown. The Unknown is infinite, it is an absolute, and like the Infinite it can also be a bit scary. That is probably why movement is more often than not away from it rather than towards it, just as most would step back from the edge of an abyssal cliff and not throw themselves off it. But that, hypothetically, is the very plunge required to break into the Unknown. This is the dive taken by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra off the mountain summit towards his ‘Great Death’ and it is the same Quixotic lunge that opens us up

157 Al-Ghazālī, The Niche of Lights, 32.
the ‘transcendent nothingness’ beyond being\textsuperscript{160} and initiates the essential existential conversion to gain passage ‘to the far side of the “yonder shore,”’ or nirvāna, where all seasoned travellers aim for.

There is the divine and the feared in the infinite. One cannot exist without the other. They are parts of the same that have nothing to do with each other what-so-ever and in fact neither can truly exist in the presence of the other. In his infamous \textit{Les Paradis Artificiels} Charles Baudelaire blames not hashish, nor opium, nor wine, but man’s thirst for the infinite for his criminal persuasions, though it is a corrupted conception of the infinite which diverts the pure. He confesses, ‘It is this corruption of the sense of the infinite, I believe, that is the cause of all man’s guilty excesses.’\textsuperscript{161}

Another form of corruption is pointed out by Zellini in Aristotle’s conception of the \textit{apeiron}, which he says is ‘indissolubly linked to a negative notion.’ He quotes from Aristotle’s \textit{Physics} where the \textit{apeiron} is conceived as fundamentally incomplete as its infiniteness means there is necessarily always something \textit{outside} of it, which therefore means it can unendingly go on in its limitlessness.

It is precisely this negativity which lead Zellini to adduce that “infinite” is a less appropriate term for the \textit{apeiron} than “unlimited” or “indefinite” as they do not carry the ‘perfection’ inferred by the term “infinite.”\textsuperscript{162} The perfection of the void enfolds the pain, fear and “evil” misadventures of being within it. Its perfection is founded in the confrontation with this despairing nihilism. The brief but illuminated life of Simon Weil (1909-1943) is testament to the conversion instaurated by the transformative act of confrontation. As a figure she cannot be readily, or helpfully separated from her ideas, that is, the connection between her experiences of physical existence and the philosophies and perspectives that arose from them are more than usually intertwined, for she was overtly living her beliefs at the same time as espousing them.

We cannot understand the infinite without the finite but we cannot either understand the infinite from the finite, it must be understood as infinite-\textit{sive}-finite and finite-\textit{sive}-infinite. This is what Nishitani means by saying infinity must “be \textit{really} lived” if we are to encounter it at all, or to “take possession” of it. Without entering into the void we can never hope to know its perfection and according to

\textsuperscript{160} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, 230-1.
\textsuperscript{161} Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Artificial Paradises}, trans., notes and intr. Stacy Diamond (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1996), 33.
\textsuperscript{162} Zellini, \textit{A Brief History of Infinity}, 3.
Weil this is not the right of the finite anyway. She writes in her notebooks, ‘the void is the supreme plenitude, but man has not the right to know this.’\textsuperscript{163} We may not have the right and nor, according to Nishitani, the reason, ‘Infinity, as a reality, is cut off from the prehension of reason.’\textsuperscript{164}

Like Aristotle’s understanding of limitless which entails there always being something outside, something more, the plenitude of the void - the infinite - comes from this same unreachable and unfulfillable potential. That is also why it is beyond the prehension of reason and in its overwhelming and vertiginous bearing may incite excesses of criminality. If the infinite is conceived as something only ever outside the human domain, that can have no connection with the finite, then it becomes what Nishida calls a ‘dark fate’ and is invariably apprehended as a negative force, ‘The infinite which merely denies the finite, is imagined as dark fate, incompatible with humanity.’\textsuperscript{165}

But being prepared to encounter the infinite on one’s own homeground is not for the faint hearted. Simon Weil may have been up to it…if her heart had allowed. There is another who unexpectedly invites the oscillations of boundless space and time into his own small sphere of reckoning. The delight and fascination Watt takes in the humble markings of a small and seemingly insignificant picture, conveys a delicacy of sensibilities which could inspire suspicions of the Mystic or Bodhisattva about him. His extraordinary lucubrations on the circle and boundless space procure an unexpected and alleviated joy at the prospect of endless time, as opposed to an abyssal despair at the ineluctable recurring noon-tide, which could less surprisingly have been the outcome:

And he wondered what the artist had intended to represent (Watt knew nothing about painting), a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively.

\textsuperscript{163} Zellini, A Brief History of Infinity, 184.
\textsuperscript{164} Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 177.
respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time (Watt knew nothing about physics), and at the thought that it was perhaps this, a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time, then Watt’s eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly.\footnote{166 Samuel Beckett, \textit{Watt} (London: John Calder (Publishers) Limited, 1970), 127.}

These nimble feats of the mind (and copy-typist) are worthy practice for the cerebral summersaults necessitated to hurdle the high horse of a logic of identity in contradiction. A logic that concedes the identity of the finite with the infinite and that affirms through negation. Just such a logic is met with in Nishida’s philosophical odyssey that led him to the outer rims of absolute nothingness with his ‘looping’\footnote{167 This is a term used by Robert Wargo to describe the consecutive and self-encompassing fields or universals that make up the structure of Nishida’s logic of \textit{basho}. See Robert J. J. Wargo, \textit{The Logic of Nothingness; A Study of Nishida Kitarō} (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).} of universals into an ultimate \textit{basho} (place or locus). The arrival at his ultimate \textit{basho} is preceded by mental gymnastics of comparative \textit{techne} to Watt. In his treatise \textit{Logic and Life}, Nishida investigates the originating structures of logic and impels us to look beyond the forms of logic as they appear and into the creative generative act before they appear. He recalls the \textit{logos} of Heraclitus and the dynamic contradictory forces of Heraclitean logic. That which appears to us as finite determined reality is not, according to Nishida, true reality. But neither is the infinite endowed with reality. Only in the dynamic interrelationship and identity of the infinite and finite is there true reality; ‘The actual is that which has been determined. It is thoroughly finite. The infinite is not actual. Yet neither is the merely finite. Actuality would have to be the contradictory self-identity of finitude and infinity.’\footnote{168 Nishida, \textit{Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness}, 53. I have quoted from the Robert Schinzinger translation but as a comparison see also Kitarō Nishida, ‘Logic and Life’ in \textit{Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō}, trans. with annotations John W.M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61. ‘The actual is that which has been determined. It is thoroughly finite. The infinite is not actual. Yet neither is the merely finite. Actuality would have to be the contradictory self-identity of finitude and infinity.’}

The doctrine of opposites is at the central ‘axis of Tao’ and from this indiscriminating centre there is no differentiation between ‘this’ or ‘that’ and everything is present in all their infinite complexities. Therefore Chuang Tzu (contested 369-286 B.C.) says, ‘The right is an infinity. The wrong is also an
infinity.' He is not speaking of what the infinite is, that is not the point he is making, but by his comments the infinite can be understood to be beyond oppositions created through “comparative relations.” For Cusanus all knowledge is come to through these comparative relations and hence since the infinite falls quite far from such possibilities Cusanus determines quite simply, ‘the infinite, qua infinite, is unknown.’

9. Fathomless Depths and the Obdurate Fragility of Surfaces

With such a spectacular array of most impressive wares it is not surprising that we are easily dazzled by the outer face of reality in its inordinate brilliance and irresistible appeal but the surface of meaning must ultimately give way just as the fresh skin of youth will eventually succumb to the flaccidity and sag of times scalpel. There is joy in the inversion; the liberating abandonment of necessarily fixed meaning, the graceful fluidity that allows one thing to be quite another.

In Watt, one of Beckett’s early novels, an ‘incident’ occurs, the first and type of many to come we are told. The incident was most peculiar and distressing to Watt for the reason that nothing had in fact occurred ‘that a thing that was nothing had happened.’ The overall moment was choreographed to perfection, displaying ‘great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport.’ In brief summary of the event: after the expected knocking and introductions etc., the Galls, a father and son piano tuning team enter the premises of Mr Knott, for whom Watt is the currently employed manservant. The piano of Mr Knott is tuned, sundry comments are passed between father and son regarding the state of the piano and then they take their leave. Watt’s mind continues to be disturbed by this ‘fugitive penetration’ until quite late in his stay at Mr Knott’s, at which point his acceptance of the nothing that had occurred was of little consequence itself, altogether ‘too late’ in fact. One source of

171 Beckett, Watt, 73.
172 Ibid., 71.
173 Ibid., 67.
Watt’s mental malaise, for there were many, was the ‘fragility of the outer meaning.’

He did not require any real meaning, somehow aware of the futility of such a pursuit, at least from an external assessment, but he did wish for some semblance of stability in whatever outer meaning was presented. Some form of fortifying “exact conclusion” to which he could anchor his oneiric grip of reality. Indeed his need was such that ‘The most meagre, the least plausible, would have satisfied Watt…the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt, more than enough for Watt.’ And as a consequence of his efforts ‘he had experienced literally nothing.’ Watt was one of those travellers on the great by-pass of life who had taken the prudent measure of ignoring, for the sake of survival mind, the inflorescence of signs and significance in heady proliferation along the way, and notwithstanding his immanent, yet somewhat latent, Bodhisattva-esqueness, had entirely missed the exit.

Before Beckett’s particular authorial presence had unleashed itself he obliged the literary and art worlds with various critiques characterised by an often caustic but acute and lucid sophistication, one of these essays was Proust. In this serpentine guide to the mechanics of Proustian memory, the ‘dolorous synthesis of survival and annihilation,’ Beckett exposes a ‘participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension.’ But in the final analysis, irrespective of the extra-temporal mystical communications of this participation ‘Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic.’

Proust, Beckett, minors and midwifes, all scratching away at this seemingly interminable and impenetrable surface to grasp onto some solid experience of true reality and finally get through to the unreachable depths of non-understanding.

Nishida; ‘I have always been a minor of ore; I have never managed to refine it.’

‘The bottom of my soul has such depth; Neither joy nor the waves of sorrow can reach it.’

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174 Beckett, Watt, 70.
175 Ibid.
177 Ibid., 55.
178 Ibid., 56.
179 Nishida, Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness, preface.
Heraclitus; Fr. D. 45 You will not find out the limits of the soul by going, even if you travel over every way, so deep is its report.\textsuperscript{181}

Kant; ‘stars at this distance may be met in space, although no one has, or ever will discover them’\textsuperscript{182}

The hermetic surface of reality is but the jetsam of a sinking ship welded together by force of its sheer mass and what lies beyond it, through the obdurate barrier of stuffs, are the untraceable currents of real life. Calvino speculates on the substance of the body of matter that makes up our objective world and concludes that ‘only what passes without leaving any trace truly exists, while everything held in our records is dead detritus, the leftovers, the waste.’\textsuperscript{183} In a comparative tale of futile extrapolation, Chuang Tzu relates a story of the ancient and legendary Chinese sovereign, the Yellow Emperor. The Emperor travels to see Kuanch’engtse for he has heard he was in possession of perfect Tao. The Yellow Emperor asks what the essence of this perfect Tao might be so that he could use its benefits for his people. "'What you are asking about’ replied Kuanch’engtse, ‘is merely the dregs of things. What you wish to control are the disintegrated factors thereof.’”\textsuperscript{184}

A perfunctory brushing of the surface can collect little more than the flotsam of thoughts unable to endure the unknown depths, the depths of unknowing. A vertiginous plummet indeed. Of Heraclitus (acquiring the infamy as “the obscure” from Timon of Phlius) Socrates is recorded as saying it would demand the skill of a Delian diver to plumb the depths and meaning of his fragments. In “Why understanding Heraclitus requires being a Delian diver?” Francesc Casadesús Bordoy proposes that there is a particular resonance and significance of this well quoted reference from Diogenes Laërtius (c. third century) with the “hidden attunement” of Heraclitus.

\textsuperscript{180} Nishida, \textit{Intelligibility and the Philosophy of Nothingness}. This quote is the frontispiece to the book and is an image of Nishida’s own calligraphy, for which he has some renown.
\textsuperscript{182} Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, 298.
\textsuperscript{183} Calvino, \textit{The Complete Cosmicomics}, 369.
Bordoy’s own excavatory plunge, for pearls or sponge, into the azure waters of Delos, reveals layers of meaning, that perhaps like the island itself, as Pliny the Elder describes it in his Naturalis Historia ‘suddenly appeared emerging from the water.’ Bordoy casts his line from the consecrated birth place of Apollo, none other than Delos, the central island of the Cyclades ring, yet its trajectory takes us far from this ‘far-seen star of the dark-blue earth’ and into the land ‘beyond of the beyond,’ of Hyperborea, from where it is also said Apollo originates, and where Nietzsche implies, in The Antichrist, we are all from. Presuming that divers from surrounding islands were equally skilled as those of Delos for lack of evidence of the contrary, Bordoy anticipates a more suggestive and layered reading consistent with the nature of utterances we have come to expect from the source and subject of the claim, Socrates and Heraclitus respectively.

The mythological and historical significance of Delos cannot be overlooked, nor indeed can its name: ‘the name of the island, Delos, alludes to the concept of brilliance, clarity, and transparency, the meanings of the homonymous adjective δῆλος [delos] in Greek. Likewise, it also carries a sense of “visible,” “manifest,” and “clear”. The opposing allusions of “delos” or “Delian” as something clear and visible against the darkness and hidden depths associative with “diver” wittingly emulate the often paradoxical and ambiguous statements for which Heraclitus is so renowned. With respect to the Apollonian associations of the island and in deference to the ‘raving mouth’ of the Delphic Sibyl, oracle of Apollo: Fr. D. 93 The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign, which displays a remarkable resemblance to the notoriously enigmatic expression of Heraclitus, Bordoy arrives at the conclusion that the interpreter of Heraclitus ‘must be someone versed in the arcane oracles of the god Apollo to be able to move freely in the sibylline depths of Heraclitean thought.’

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186 Ibid.
187 Kingsley, A Story Waiting to Pierce You, 3.
190 Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 43.
191 Bordoy, ‘Why understanding Heraclitus requires being a Delian diver?’ 11.
From Delos as the consecrated birth place of Apollo, Bordoy proceeds to Pythagoras (c.570-495 B.C.) and his recollection of a previous reincarnation as a Delian fisherman. With concession to the noteworthy difference of a fisherman’s connection with water being markedly less profound than a diver’s, literally speaking that is, the significance of the recollection lies once again with Delos and Apollo. This is further emphasised by the succession of reincarnations recorded by Diogenes as including Hermotimus, whom is more directly identified with the Hyperborean Apollo. Peter Kingsley notes an alternative appellation used in reference to Pythagoras as no less than ‘Apollo arrived from Hyperborea.’ Considering Heraclitus’s splenetic denouncement of polymaths like Pythagoras, whom he reproaches as ‘the prince of imposters,’ it is a curious supposition to connect them, and perhaps for its oddity alone begs elaboration.

A tentative exploration (purely experimental speculation) of Fr. D. 51 They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre, could strengthen the weak threads of our net cast by a Delian fisherman, stretched across the Ural mountains and back into the translucent depths of the Aegean sea. Leaving aside philological and textual debate over what have here been rendered as “attunement” (ἁρμονίη – harmoniē), “turning back” (παλίντροπος – palintropos) and “it (a thing or logos) agrees with itself” (ὁμολογεῖ – homologeī) the fragment could be a surreptitious suggestion on how to interpret Heraclitus himself, and not just the structure of the cosmos. Essentially there is nothing to separate Heraclitus as a part of the cosmic whole from the whole that he is part of. T. M. Robinson hints at something similar when he writes ‘Heraclitus himself may be the most compelling instance of the “interconnectedness of opposites.”’ Robinson is questioning how much Heraclitus himself believed of his own account, but leaves the question ‘happily, unanswerable.’

Both the bow and lyre are instrumental attributes of Apollo, one of war and one of peace. Bordoy describes Heraclitus’s connection with Apollo as ‘notorious.’ There are several fragments which make either overt or oblique references to Apollo. This needn’t signify anything of dramatic import, as has

192 Kingsley, 120, nt. 21.
195 Bordoy, ‘Why understanding Heraclitus requires being a Delian diver?’ 8.
already been touched on, the Ionian cosmologists of which we can consider Heraclitus a peripheral member, though not strictly a ‘physikos or natural philosopher proper,’196 were still connected to their poetic and mythological antecedents. It would perhaps be more significant if there was a conspicuous absence of such referral within the fragments, as Kingsley avers ‘After all, history – our history- is not so much a matter of what is remembered or repeated as the things we prefer to leave unsaid.’197

The reference to “A thing agrees at variance with itself” could equally refer to Heraclitus himself, that is, that he is actually in disagreement with his own statements. In disagreeing with what he himself states he is in actual accord, he turns back on his own words to create harmony. War in turning back on itself creates peace. His reactions against Homer, Thales, Pythagoras and the polymaths are to be recanted in harmony. That, despite what he appears to state there is the ineluctable condition of flux that will invoke the balance and convert his words into harmonious support. On a similar principle, following an approach of “knowledge-how” over “knowledge-that,”198 Eugenio Benitez determines it is reasonable to presume that the ‘structure of opposition’199 in the fragments, which yields often opposing outcomes, does not mean that these outcomes are necessarily mutually exclusive. This perspective follows a thinking aligned with the Doctrine of the Mean that is found in the philosophy of Chuang Tzu, and which holds that without conflict multiple viewpoints or paths may be pursued.200

But harmony is also created through discord or opposing notes. Perhaps the opposing notes were those of Pythagoras and Heraclitus. Maybe Heraclitus’s denouncement of Pythagoras as the ‘prince of imposters’ (from Philodemus D. 81 Pythagoras was the prince of imposters. Noted that this is a contestable quotation) was because Heraclitus makes claim to the Apollonian lineage that Pythagoras instead receives; the arrow should have been handed to Heraclitus! ‘Sent by the god Apollo with an arrow in his hand, Abaris carried a thread of one-pointedness joining the East to the West. And the thread is so fine it has nearly gone unseen.’201 It is the

197 Kingsley, A Story Waiting to Pierce You, 4.
198 Following terminology introduced with the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976).
199 Eugenio Benitez, Navigating the Depths: Dynamic Wisdom and the Flux of Thought in Heraclitus, unpublished paper, 47
200 See Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, 184.
201 Kingsley, A Story Waiting to Pierce You, 30.
oracular voice of Heraclitus after all that Nietzsche proclaims espouses its profound intuitive wisdom ‘in Sibylline rapture.’ The arrow of Abaris invokes its circle and we can only but imagine its centre.

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Another little peculiarity of Watt’s was a great need of ‘semantic succour.’ Undoubtedly this was a symptom of his general condition to which meaning, any meaning, was necessarily prescribed to appease the dyspeptic fluctuations afflicting his external world. So desirous of ‘the illusion of fixity’ is Watt (a true Parmenidean) that he requires the surface of “outer meaning,” the woolly patchwork of tangible form, even though at the slightest prod it will perforate, to maintain his litigious orientation within the world. There is, however, rather unexpectedly, something of a Bodhisattva about Watt, in a deeply unconscious way. He is not so deluded as to be convinced by the specious guises of nomenclature, yet short of the imaginative faculties to transcend them he remains contractually obliged:

As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. But Watt’s imagination had never been a lively one. So he continued to think of himself as a man...But for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn.

Ultimately Watt submits to these less than satisfactory terms and demonstrates, for the most part, with a serene equanimity, or at very least, a healthy “ataraxy.” The ‘veil of illusion and unknowing [which] cuts us off from any possible cognition,’ or, as in the case of Watt, any possible experience, ‘let alone valid enunciation of objective truths and relations, even if the latter exist’ instigates a reflexive scepticism towards any imaginable “semantic succour.” No longer cowering under the fortifying and oppressive baptismal buttress from which

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202 Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 69.
204 Ibid., 207.
205 Ibid., 80.
206 Steiner, Real Presences, 91.
First Episode

hangs the corresponding object, subject, matter, incident etc. we embark: free to follow the vagaries of our imagination.

10. The Silent Aria

_The disquieting voice of reason speaking so that Reason cannot hear and interject. Which ear is ready to receive word not spoken, not written, not even hummed?_

Nietzsche’s deep attraction to and connection with the ancient Greeks that is borne out in his grappling with and eventual digestion of the contradictory forces of the Dionysian and Apolline, is testimony to his own personal sympathetic resonance with these mysterious forces; His own disquieting _daimon_ perhaps guiding his attraction and insight. Of Socrates, the optimistic Apolline, he writes in _The Birth of Tragedy_, ‘In exceptional situations, when his tremendous intelligence falters, he found guidance in a divine voice that spoke at such moments’\(^{207}\) it is the phenomenon of Socrates’s _daimonion_ (from the Greek _δαίμων_) of which he speaks. But this guiding spirit, unlike the illuminative discourse or ecstatic vision of epiphany that one might expect from such an exceptional visitation, is a voice that _‘admonishes.’_ That Socrates’s intuitive knowledge or _‘instinctive wisdom’_ is subject to a critical and rationalising influence presses Nietzsche to declare ‘that Socrates might be described as the very embodiment of the _non-mystic._’ What is so extraordinary about this logical superfoetation of Socrates is that it parallels that which is normally encountered only in the ‘greatest instinctive forces.’\(^{208}\)

Fourteen years after the first publication of _The Birth of Tragedy_ in 1872, Nietzsche writes “Attempt at a Self-Criticism”, a form of _apologia_ for the book which is included in the new edition and its subsequent publications. As Michael Tanner points out, this form of personal riposte is not an altogether unfamiliar tactic from an author reviewing their early work yet there is still valuable merit in what retrospective comment reveals, both of what was said and what wasn’t. In Nietzsche’s case it is more a matter of _how_ it was said that comes under his own scathing and chagrined scrutiny. He regrets the weakness of not having the courage

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208 Ibid.
to forge a new language, or at very least to express himself in terms more appropriate to what he was saying, probably in terms more like those of his ‘Dionysiac monster called Zarathustra,’ the fourth and final part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra having been published the year before. The voice he describes, his own, resounds in reverberate accord with the daimon of Socrates; ‘a strange voice, the disciple of a still “unknown god”, disguised beneath the scholar’s hood.’209 Critique presupposes interest. Apathy or disinterest would never inspire irascibility, disdain, scorn. This is in accordance with the disagreeing attunement of Heraclitus’s fragment D. 51. It is a principle of critical association (not ‘free association’210).

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With characteristic eloquent disdain, Beckett admonishes the general public, the hoi polloi, (a distinctly Heraclitean gesture) for being ‘too decadent to receive’ the direct expression of symbolic form of Joyce’s Work in Progress211 which ‘is not about something; it is that something itself.’212 Satisfaction with a superficial reading that merely absorbs ‘the scant cream of sense’213 may yield immediate benefits, but like all those three and a half minute hit singles, easy for the listeners ear to digest on the initial sounding, the brevity of interest (and track time) reflects the quality of the vintage.

2.1 Yer Awning

From the breezy balcony of world’s edge a procession of triumphant flag waving Titans parade past, off to the Olympics to race against Time. But, as fate would have it, tired of all the heroic antics, the gaping yawn of Chaos, from the breezy balcony of world’s edge, blows them all away. They are sucked into the aitherial vortex of no-where in particular, before even the games begin. And from this hallowed void

209 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 6.
210 Kahn writes that he postulates connections within the fragments ‘at the risk of yielding to free association.’ See Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 228.
211 The early name for the as of yet published Ulysses.
212 Beckett, Disjecta, 27.
213 Ibid., 26. ‘The rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense’ which, he continues, ‘is made possible by what I [Beckett] may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation.’
the world continues on as a middle place ‘right in the midst of time,’

Occupyng the liminal territories ‘between the two regions of light provided by archaic poetry on one hand and classical philosophy on the other’ in what Kahn calls a ‘dark period of transition and creation’ the Milesian venture itself represents in historical terms the equivalent of the “intermediary” and “in-between” that in a certain respect have come to qualify the *apeiron* in lieu of determining its exact indeterminacy. The formulation of a substance *between* elements comes from Aristotle, and although there is some confusion and not a little contradicting, it is deemed fairly sure that he had the *apeiron* of Anaximander in mind with the proposition. Amidst several variants, primeval Chaos (Χάος) was also posited as a region *between*, often earth and aither or earth and sky. Verily as it comes into being, Chaos, the gap between earth and sky, precipitates the first stage of a differentiated world. The prodigious birth of irreconcilable dualisms in the western philosophical tradition thus begins. It is a divine (where all contradictions are reconciled) paradox that from a gaping yawn and an elemental nonentity sprung forth all that is. It is understandable that a material system predicated on a law of non-contradiction could not account for such penumbral activity. To be consistent with his greater program, Aristotle introduces a substance in-between the elements - usually between water and air or fire and air - which is a perfectly adequate placement if paradox cannot be accepted and dualisms cannot be unified.

Even whilst commanding such vast expanses and limitless perspectives, formulations of the *apeiron* whether “in-between,” “everlasting,” “immortal and indestructible” are still subject to the adjudications of Our Mighty Chronos and positioned within the accommodating boundaries of a spatial conception. Caught as we are in the causal nexus of space and time, so too, are the limits of our understanding bordered by the “terms which make sense.” One version of the Olympic genealogy has Zeus saved from the voracious appetite of his father Kronos.

214 Stambaugh, *Impermanence is Buddha-nature*, 43.
217 Ibid., 24-32.
(Κρόνον)\textsuperscript{218} whose ill-begotten megalomania led to the devouring of all his children (apart from Zeus, through the cunning wiles of his mother, Rhea, with the assistance of Gaia, the two times conspirator contra paternal paedophagy - a most commendable accolade on her behalf) by being hung from a tree on the island of Crete by the nymph Adamanthea, and thus dangling in “a great, mighty gulf here and there,” between the realms of Kronos’s dominion: earth, sea and the heavens, Zeus was made invisible to his father. The continuing life of the Gods (Zeus was a most productive progenitor) was miraculously achieved by escape through the interstices of the “terms which make sense” to Kronos.

In the Hieroi Logoi in 24 Rhapsodies (Sacred Logos), or as they are often more simply called, the “Orphic Rhapsodies,” 269 heterogeneous fragments of uncertain authorship, many of which take attribute from the Hesiodic Theogony, Chronos is customarily placed at the origin of all and produces Aither as well as masterfully orchestrating the dehiscent void of Chaos ‘This Chronos, unageing and of imperishable counsel, produced Aither, and a great, mighty gulf here and there.’\textsuperscript{219} The Orphic pantheon is not however, a straight forward matter of theogonic begetting. There are renegade winged self-fertilizing bisexuals ‘bright and aitherial’ vying for top dog/prima donna status, well, at least one on the loose, by the name of Phanes. Who along with Aither, Chaos and an unexpected ‘silvery egg’ which sometimes morphs into a ‘shining tunic’ and is probably worn by Phanes, contends for prime ring side position. Nyx (Night), daughter of Phanes, also asserts her cosmogonical priority and as demonstrable evidence of her Godly prowess produces Gaia (Earth) and Ouranos (Sky/Heaven) for a second time, her father having already created them along with Olympus, sun and moon, but perhaps she was perfecting the paternal patent; ‘And she, again, bore Gaia and broad Ouranos, and revealed them as manifest, from being unseen, and who they are by birth.’\textsuperscript{220}

But then it is also thought that Night could just be primeval matter, preceding even Chronos, and not a divine entity at all.\textsuperscript{221} The separation of Gaia and Ouranos

\textsuperscript{218} For discussion on kronos-chronos etymology and confusion see Kirk and Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers, 56.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 41. See 37-48 for detailed account of orphic cosmogonies and their influence and relevance for the Ionian natural philosophers.
\textsuperscript{220} Fragment 109 from Orphic Rhapsodies. See Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{221} A new critical and vastly extended edition of the rhapsodies and all the orphic literature surrounding them is currently being compiled which will replace the 1922 Kern edition that has been the scholars standard to date. See Alberto Bernabé (ed.), Orphicorum et Orphicis similium testimonia.
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from the vaporous exhalations of misty font (or from Night) and from each other to rent open the great windy chasm of Chaos, the particulars of which are so incalculable and veiled by murk ‘we need not concern ourselves with its peculiar geography,’ is a primordial rendering of the abyss of Great Doubt that opens up beneath us as we earnestly enquire into the origins and ends of life, the ‘One Great Matter,’ birth-and-death. It is in between the before (Gaia-the life giving Earth) and after (Ouranos-the heavenly projection) that we stand in the unknown depths of the moment, in chaos and darkness.

11. Great Doubt

Great in the magnitude of its power, in its expansiveness, depth and magnificence, and above all these, the greatness of doubt is its commitment to truth and its courage to disbelieve. In doubt we see through to the bottomless suchness of all things. To be bottomlessly in time in the world means to be in the world ‘groundlessly and with nothing to rely on.’ To rely on nothing is absolute freedom. This is the bottomless freedom of Great Doubt that transforms emptiness into knowledge, but it is a ‘phantom-like Wisdom’ of emptiness.

Only in full confrontation with this doubt, “the abyss of Great Doubt,” is it converted from despair and the longing to die into the longing for return. In the conclusion of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Zarathustra emerges from the abyssal depths of despair and he ‘ends his journey by affirming and blessing life’s recurrence.’ In Nietzsche’s estimation the apeiron is not simply Anaximander’s answer to the archaic question of originative substances, ‘Anaximander was no longer dealing with the question of the origin of this world in a purely physical way,’ but is in fact the first declared confrontation with ethics. Weighing up of the world from his ‘metaphysical fortress’ to which he has fled ‘From this world of injustice, of insolent apostasy from the primeval one-ness of all things, Anaximander flees into a metaphysical fortress from which he leans out, letting his gaze sweep the horizon…’


Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 160.

the question of existence, the meaning and value of life, emerges. As far as Nietzsche sees it, Anaximander’s response is one of expiation through death, thus is his interpretation of the ‘lapidary sentence’ left to us of Anaximander: “out of those things whence is the generation for existing things, into these again does their destruction take place, according to what must needs be; for they make amends and give reparation to one another for their offense.” But it is also through the living events of the world as they unfold, and not just in the death of those living events, that we determine a relationship with the ethical supposition in the apeiron. The lure of the apeiron tempts a courageous movement, a plunge into the abyss, though not between being and nothingness, word and world, seen and unseen but into the very centre where everything meets on its own home-ground.

Philosophical skepsis tends towards resolution, it is a productive doubt which motivates inquiry and steadies the keel as the peregrinate vessel (mind) lurches forward in perpetual search for solid footing, new ground, albeit hitherto unknown, yet terra firma is none-the-less the ultimate destination. Skepsis in this sense is actually surety, an undisclosed persevering faith. This is the faith that William James (1842-1910) sermonises (in his own evaluation) in his address to Yale and Brown Universities. James proposes “The Will to Believe” underlies all speculative science – where there is a willingness to act, there is belief, the hypothesis is thus imbued with life and bolstered by the Will to Believe the momentous event of embarkment salutes the high horn of departure and knowledge, with anchors aweigh, is put to sea. Believability or verifiability is not an intrinsic property of the hypothesis but rather belongs ‘to the individual thinker.’ Thus in the hazardous enterprise of Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Truth’ – to which James’s ‘Will to Believe’ has plausible connections, though ostensibly arguing entirely to the contrary – the logical affirmation of reality is guided to its port only by the buoyant beacon of belief, in its turn tendered by doubt.

Aristotle would have us believe aporia (doubt or philosophical puzzlement) leads to thaumazein (astonishment or wonderment). And wonder, according to Plato, as he has Socrates tell it in Theaetetus, is the starting point of philosophical

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225 Nietzsche, Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, 48.
227 Though I believe it is a semantic and superficial conflict of doctrines, and that they share the same luminous goal.
thinking, ‘a sense of wonder – is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation, in fact.’

1.4 Indefinite, Outside, Unseen, Unsaid but Directly Experienced

How really can we, with such small pin holes to see, ever perceive the true grandness of anything? We can peer through our little key holes and only imagine what opening the door would reveal, and in fact not even that. Our imaginations aren’t up to it either. The whole cannot be conceived but it may be experienced through its parts, and that which is inconceivable can be turned into a very pretty lyric verse and penetrate to the depths of our souls. And the best demonstration of the apeiron may be in the fact that it isn’t.

The conception of the apeiron as an intermediary substance does not necessarily break from a material formulation of it. The inexorable boundaries of scientific rationale, space and time, gather fortitude with the awakening of the natural philosophers and ironically temper their breadth, perspicacity and, dare I say it, profundity of vision. It is as if the rising powers of observation cannot yet break through the nocturnal covering of the Ouranol bowl. Reaching the limits of peripheral vision, the reflective light of observation is deflected back in a ricochet of incandescent rarefaction. Passing through the ‘dark and windy’ gap between, aspirations of ascension and illumination are bound to a tellurian order and the apophatic lights of divine mystery are finally snuffed out by the “violent winds” and “rough movements,” that al-Ghazālī cautioned against, and are converted from ‘spirit into matter.’ The powers of observation will after all only perceive what can be seen, which are poor pickings indeed. The field would open to a far greater yield from breaching rather than simply reaching its limits. Understanding of the apeiron can only be obtained by a breach of limits as well for as Graham affirms, ‘It is not itself the matter of the world, as Aristotle wants to claim.’ Graham then asks how we can ever truly know the effects of the apeiron upon our being in the world; a

231 Graham, Explaining the Cosmos, 33.
question that follows in the tradition of Nietzsche’s assertion of the *apeiron* being the first expression of ethical interest from Archaic Greece.

What then is the ontological relationship between the boundless and the stuffs of our world? We simply do not know. The boundless remains outside the cosmos, surrounding and controlling it in some fashion, but it is not, so far as Anaximander tells us, in our world. It is forever inaccessible and mysterious, beyond empirical scrutiny. We know only its results, not its nature. As to events in this world, we must understand them in light of the powers and materials in it, and their own behaviour.\(^{232}\)

The fact that the *apeiron* is ‘beyond empirical scrutiny’ clearly indicates that as a conception it has, just as Nietzsche suggests, far more than a “purely physical” significance. ‘The term άπειρον had the advantage of predicking something positive of the ἀρχή without committing Anaximander to any view of its nature. He chose it precisely because it did not refer to the kind of substance but only to its vastness of extent.’\(^{233}\)

By using a physical model, however ephemeral it might be, and even if in its infiniteness, it perforates the boundaries of “empirical scrutiny,” the insubstantial and invisible can somehow emerge into declared awareness. In Bruno’s explorations of the Infinite the ‘dimensional and corporeal substance depends on the incorporeal and the indivisible.’\(^{234}\) We can only comprehend the infinite through its simplification, or through its potentiality, which means that we can’t *really* apprehend it at all. Through reason we are only forced into ‘a fatal participation with potentiality and matter.’\(^{235}\) So, Bruno relates through his interlocutors of the “Second Dialogue” of his *Cause, Principle and Unity*, that:

> Of the divine substance then – as well because it is infinite as because it is extremely remote from those effects which are at the furthest limit of the course of our discursive faculties - we can know nothing, except by the method of traces, as the Platonists say; of remote effects, as the Peripatetics say; of the raiment, as the Cabalists say; of the shoulder or back, as the

\(^{232}\) Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos*, 34.  
\(^{233}\) Gottschalk, ‘Anaximander’s “Apeiron,”’ 53.  
Talmudists say; of the mirror, the shadow, and the enigma, as the Apocalyptics say. 236

To many the particular is but a shadow reality, an empty silhouette of a vast invisible dominion; merely a “‘modus’ of the “substantia.”’ But from another perspective, even on the two-dimensional background of a formless eternity, individuality ‘produces form everywhere.’ It is this latter perspective that Nishida celebrates in the metaphysics of Goethe’s lyric poetry, an art which he declares ‘the formless voice of life.’ 237 It is the directly personal expression and humanity of Goethe’s poetry that in Nishida’s analysis is what brings its song into harmony with the universal. Calvino expresses the same feeling for the paradoxical communion of the finite and infinite in *Cosmicomics*. The progressive levels of revelation of Qfwfq, previously introduced from Calvino’s *Cosmicomics*, lead him first to the nothingness that is everything, and then slightly more challenging, his place in relation to the nothingness that is not just a “dark fate, incompatible with humanity.” Qfwfq realises there is a vital interpenetration between worlds and that ‘The only contact we could have with the void was through this little the void had produced as quintessence of its own emptiness; the only image we had of the void was our own poor universe.’ 238 In other words the only way to the universal was through the particular.

Following the beliefs of Bertrando Spaventa, 239 Zellini positively defends Bruno’s conception of the infinite and begs to differ from the scholar’s that believed he had confused the indefinite *apeiron* with true infinity. However, in the “Fifth Dialogue” there is given an explication of the Infinite Substance that, not-withstanding Zellini’s well-founded repudiation of the scholars, displays all the trimmings of appearing to be the *apeiron*:

Because it is the unique and radical substance of all things, it is impossible that it should have a certain and determined name and such a term that signifies positively rather than privatively; and therefore, it has been called by

some “point,” by others “unity,” by others “infinity,” and by others variously
according to other concepts similar to these.240

Nietzsche conceives of the *apeiron* as eternal and indefinite, as most
commentators would agree, and he cites the lack of definite qualities – hence one of
its interpretations as indefinite – as precisely what makes it eternal. Possessing
nothing which may pass away the, ‘unimpeided course of coming-to-be’ is given full
passage in Nietzsche’s appraisal of *becoming*. He interprets Anaximander’s
“lapidary sentence” to mean ‘that which truly *is…*cannot possess definite
characteristics.’241

Kahn humourously, and with good understanding of how such an enthralling concept
might mesmerise its audience into tainted truths, points out the very common fault in
most commentators, who he says are ‘so fascinated by the concept of *das Unendliche*
[the infinite] as the source of all that exists that they never seriously considered the
possibility that τὸ ἀπειρὸν might not even be mentioned in the only sentence
surviving from Anaximander’s book.’242 This small methodological hiccup can
perhaps be explained away by the fact that the overwhelming import of the *apeiron*
is only further confirmed by the fact that it doesn’t actually officially, historically in
a verifiably documented capacity, exist. It is not the only grand idea that follows this
invisible course to insubstantiality. Nishida’s *basho*, which by his own
acknowledgment owes something to the Greeks, is also interpreted as an
‘indeterminate nothing.’243

The *apeiron* and *basho* would not then be favoured by ‘the uninitiated’ as
Socrates calls the ‘uncouth,’ ‘hard, obstinate people’ who refuse to believe anything
they cannot see or have some palpable physical exchange with; ‘The uninitiated are
those whose sole criterion of existence is what they can get a good grip on with their
hands, and who refuse to accept that causes and effects and anything invisible have
any place in reality.’244

243 Nishida, ‘Basho’ in *Place and Dialectic*, 31, translator’s synopsis.
244 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 38.
1.5 Coincidentia Oppositorum

There is not a little illogic at play within a reality that is the unification of contradictory opposites and yet it seems undeniable that ‘wherever there is contradiction and struggle, there is reality.’

The *apeiron* seems to magically contain and express completely contradictory meanings. Following Homer it is ‘concrete bulk, magnitude, and extension’ it implies something so vast that it may very well be entirely ‘uncrossable,’ (from *perao*, “pass over”) but it remains none-the-less a solid mass. Then it came to mean “boundless,” “indefinite,” “infinite,” “qualitatively indeterminate,” “inexhaustible,” all of which would be invalidated by reference to a mass of any type – as this infers limit. The *apeiron* thus conceived becomes perhaps the first philosophical articulation of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. If ‘the name of Anaximander stands here as a symbol for the anonymous creative spirit of Ionian thought in the sixth century,’ then in a kind of ygolotnoealap (a slight adjustment in the excavatory order) the *apeiron* could now stand for ‘the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin’ in the creative gesture of the twenty-first century. The *apeiron* continues to demonstrate, to be, the terms of its understanding. With munificent largesse it embraces all contenders, allowing and even nurturing the variance of interpretations.

The bewilderment surrounding the *apeiron* makes even more sense when it is tallied up along-side the goading challenge of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The puzzlement and wonder match the contrary forces at work in the word *thaumazein* which allegedly initiates all philosophical inquiry. John Llewelyn calls *thaumazein* ‘one of those wonderful words that face in opposite directions at one and the same time…*thaumazein* both opens our eyes wide and plunges us into the dark. It is both startled start and flinching in bewilderment.’ There is an intriguing meeting

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between the *apeiron* as an indefinable concept which houses and transforms contradictory meanings, the philosophical inquiry beginning with *thaumazein* which itself is a word of contrary forces working in opposite directions, and the *apeiron* being an ostensible introduction to the philosophical standpoint of *coincidentia oppositorum*. A meeting which would make of that which steers all and is the eternal principle element of all things, the ungenerated beginning and end, a *coincidentia oppositorum*. I concur.

Adorno finds the same structure of contradictory identity at the basis of truth. Each truth must carry its own negation to exist at all, ‘the truth of ideas is bound up with the possibility of their being wrong, the possibility of their failure.’ This potential contradiction does not discredit the validity of truth once arrived at but insists on a continuous movement in the dark towards a transcendent absolute where the contradictions within truth are negated; ‘nothing can be experienced as living if it does not contain a promise of something transcending life. This transcendence therefore is, and at the same time is not – and beyond that contradiction it is no doubt very difficult, and probably impossible, for thought to go.’

As Nietzsche tells it, Heraclitus was able to overcome the dark and indefinite world of his predecessor Anaximander by dint of his unique perspective on harmonious tensions. Gazing out at ‘this world of injustice, of insolent apostasy from the primeval one-ness of all things’ from which Anaximander fled into his ‘metaphysical fortress’ Heraclitus perceived nothing but harmony in the disparities of light and dark in the indefinite and undefinable world of his predecessor, a world which must be apprehended intuitively to be comprehended. At least this is how Nietzsche presents the driving force of Heraclitus’s thought and why he is able to overcome the ‘melancholy’ of Anaximander’s perspective.

Ironically it is Heraclitus who has borne the reputation for melancholy and weeping, infamously labelled the ‘weeping philosopher’ through a mis-interpretation of Theophrastus’s attribution of *μελαγχολία* (melancholia) to him, which rather meant ‘impulsiveness’ in its earlier use. The irony of the supposedly humourless and heavy hearted Heraclitus overcoming the cruel and evil injustices of the world through his vision of harmonious tensions and nihilistic Nietzsche trumpeting the


essence of “Greek cheerfulness” – as he calls it – is a paradox most befitting an espousers of the unity or identity of opposites and a faithless believer. A perfect demonstration of their doctrines, if in the dangerous need for theoretical categorisation we must risk calling them so.

12. On Nothingness, Uncertainty, Unknowing and Truth. The Leap (Forging Truth) and the Münchhausen Trilemma.

‘Truth will have no Gods before it. The belief in truth begins with the doubt of all truths in which one has previously believed.’

In our perpetual confrontation with truth: the origin of it, the value, the why is it that we even pursue it? there is the tacit presumption that truth is good, truth is real, truth in short is, and must be pursued at all costs. Nietzsche takes a bold step away from this presumption and asks us why ‘Granted that we want the truth: why not rather untruth? And uncertainty? Even ignorance?’ The moral standing of truth becomes very problematic once the idea of morality is overturned, as it is in Nietzsche’s Will to Power. He does not deny the value of truth but rather ‘he challenges dominant assumptions we have about the good of truth and its normative forces.’ What Nietzsche rails continuously against is the dramatic chiaroscuro of a righteous philosophy nurtured on the Aristotelian aversion to the antinomies of contradiction and which forever seeks the stable assurance of an Archimedean axis. His proposal of uncertainty and ignorance is an invitation to take up the truth of unstable and changing realities forged on individual inward truth seeking.

The “True Dharma” in Zen is a form of truth conception that fully acknowledges the individual and therefore contradictory levels of truth. True Dharma is an ‘as-it-is-ness’ which is known only in individual experience. Śākyamuni transmits this ‘formless form’ through his beatific gesture and then saying ‘I have the all-pervading True Dharma, incomparable Nirvāna, exquisite teaching of formless form. It does not rely on letters and is transmitted outside

scriptures,’ he acknowledges the transmission to Mahākāśyapa. As the truth is individualised through experience there really can be no judicature on which is the right experience or good experience of this truth, it simply is ‘as-it-is-ness.’ It is truth beyond good or evil, beyond consciousness, beyond intellection ‘for experiential fact does not belong to the realm of logic and intellect.’

Nishida presents the possibility of an Archimedean point of truth through the teaching of Lin-chi (Japanese: Rinzai), who says ‘When there is complete self-mastery, everywhere one stands is the truth.’ This means that the more one becomes oneself, is oneself, the more one stands in truth. It also pertains to the dialectic of absence and presence that is the self-determination of the absolute. Recalling Dōgen’s words again ‘To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self,’ thus in the absence of self, one exists ‘in a relation of inverse polarity with the absolute.’ By making the individual the self-expressive centre of the absolute, Nishida does not wish to imply that we become Nietzsche’s Übermensch, and nor that the individual self is lost or absorbed into the absolute but rather that it ‘becomes a unique expression of the world’s self-expression.’

In the wake of Dōgen’s titanic movement of being-time the truth in Nishida’s account is also a timely matter. Truth as an individualised point or event of being cannot therefore be separated from time either; ‘The truth is known as kairos: it is timely in the sense of being the determination of the absolute present.’ The truth too is full of time, it is ‘timeful’ in its timely-ness. Naming truth as kairos as Nishida does here, it begins to take on characteristics of Nietzsche’s “Gate named Augenblick”. The cross roads where past and present meet in the eternal now of the present thus becomes the Archimedean point of truth of absolute self-determination. It is in this one eternal moment of presence that it can be said “everywhere one stands is the truth.”

If we follow the path forged already by Heraclitus then the truth of the logos may become clear to us. And if, as Diels suggests, the real starting point for Heraclitus was Fr. D. 101 I went in search of myself, then in his stead, with this same inward search for ourselves we may see the cosmic pattern of truth without.

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Heraclitus does not leave us stranded in the obscurity of his words and entangled in the ‘thicket of riddles’ but lights the way for us through his lead, lest our own light becomes quenched as we sleep in forgetfulness and fail to recognise what we encounter in the dimming of life. All we need do is listen, but with more than our ears, and see, but with the depths of our soul.

Graham advances a view of the fragments as not merely statements but as experiences. The very structuring of the fragments is the first “sign-post” in Heraclitus’s didactic guide to understanding nature and our life as a harmonious part of this over-all structure, ‘his style is a manifestation of his conception of the world.’ The excogitative flocclulations that an encounter with Heraclitus’s text excite ‘are much like our encounters with the world: the superficial meaning conceals a deeper structure and reality.’ As we have previously alluded to this kind of encounter sponsored by Graham is what Benitez refers to as a ‘knowledge-how’ (as the counterpart to the more standard tack of ‘knowledge-that’). In a new reading of the fragments that emphasises their concrete and everyday pedagogical qualities Benitez harnesses and encourages the ‘dynamic wisdom’ that a ‘knowledge-how’ approach elicits. Comparatively, the instructive process of navigating the fragments as a ‘knowledge-how’ exercise is identified by Freeman in the parables of Jesus as a “skilful means” for inviting their hearer to a direct participation in their symbolic referent.

Departing from Graham in his central assertion of a ‘Primacy of Doctrines Thesis,’ which ultimately drives the outcome of Graham’s ‘knowledge-how’ methodology, Benitez is left to question the nature of the skill gleaned; ‘What kind of skill or ability is imparted in working through non-doctrinal fragments that yield no solution?’ He arrives, without ever alighting, on the capricious flickering edges

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260 ‘Sign-posts’ and ‘stand-ins’ are how Benitez refers to Graham’s understanding of how the concrete examples given in the fragments are part of a process of a more complex understanding of a ‘higher reality.’ See Benitez, *Navigating the Depths*, 8.
of thought in constant flux, that is, what the experience of reading the fragments creates is ‘the elimination of “stillness” in thought.’

This experience is ‘imparted to the readers of the fragments’ in a manner reminiscent of what Thomas Kasulis, translator and scholar of Dōgen, calls a ‘meeting half way.’ Under the instruction of a passage from “Mitsugo,” Kasulis determines his role as a translator of Dōgen as a special and vital intimacy with the text to bring it into wholeness. His role as a translator of Dōgen is in effect really a working relationship with Dōgen. The passage referred to is translated by Kasulis as: ‘Because “the intimate is what is near you,” everything exists through intimacy; each half exists through intimacy’ and by Chodo Cross and Gudo Wafu Nishijima as ‘Because secrecy surrounds you, everything relies on secrecy, and a single or half a thing relies on secrecy.’ Mitsugo is variably translated in these two cases as “secret” and “intimate” respectively. The two interpretations could imply a rather radical difference of meaning, one pertaining to the undisclosed or “secret” and the other infers a knowing so inherent it does not need to be disclosed. In fact both are quite appropriate, and do not necessarily contradict each-other in the ineffable moment of the present in which the Dharma is transmitted, nor in the intimate meeting of the other half when reading Dōgen nor in the unplumbable depths of our souls where we follow the lead of Heraclitus. Dōgen says ‘Because the present is an ineffable moment it is secret to the self, it is secret to others.’ The “ineffable moment” (nan no jisetsu) is a time inexpressible through hours and minutes, it is a ‘real time.’

The moment of Mahākāśyapa’s enlightenment was just such a real time, an ineffable moment.

Comparatively Graham espouses the intuitive dimension of Heraclitean thought. He situates intuitive cognition in an ‘inductive stage of understanding’ which is able to divine unexpected significance from the everyday and from disparate elements, comprehend a harmonious whole. Suggestive of a form of

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264 Benitez, *Navigating the Depths*, 44.
265 Ibid.
266 The meaning of mitsugo is not limited to these but also implies “mystical,” “mysterious,” and “hidden meaning.” Mitsu” pertaining to the mysterious or secret etc and “go” to talk or words.
268 Ibid., 136, nt. 26.
269 Graham, ‘Heraclitus, Flux, Order and Knowledge,’ 183.
transcendent knowing, Graham discourses on the illuminative principles active in the insight of intuitive cognition:

What it gives us is insight into the world and its complexity. Insight, of course, is an elusive kind of cognition: understanding comes suddenly, as we say, “in a flash of insight,” without any obvious contribution on our own part. It is precisely the sort of cognition that seems spontaneous and undirected, though it may clarify and organize a large segment of our experience for us.

As much as Graham’s rendering of a “flash of insight” is like the sudden enlightenment of Mahākāśyapa, kindled by the twisting of the golden lotus, so it is also akin to Ibn al-Arabi’s epiphanic “opening” to God.

We can, with fortitude and perhaps “a flash of insight,” follow Heraclitus in his discombobulating see-sawing of ups and downs in the vertiginous depths of his search and we may also perhaps find him while we are at it. For example, as Graham suggests, the syntactic ambiguity of the river fragment: D. 12 As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them, (which is somewhat abrogated in the translation to modern English) precipitates the same flux in understanding the meaning as the meaning of flux it purportedly precipitates. The act of comprehension becomes an experience, meaning is ingested and assimilated, embodied, lived.

The moveable meaning and purposeful ambiguity within the structure of the fragment is the very same as the experience of the reader as they grapple with the sense of it and, more importantly, more poignantly and more brilliantly masterful, it also reflects the movement of a river: its eddies and pools, turgid depths, shimmering stillness and clarity and unexpected turns and activity.

Graham alleges: ‘The river fragment is not only a statement, it is an experience...The statement is an exercise in experience that sharpens our understandings in preparation for confronting sense experience.’

The experience of the river fragment may not just be contained to the statement, but may in the same sense that Kasulis reads Dōgen, be a meeting half way of Heraclitus. Heraclitus as a

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dynamic part of the self-determining cosmos cannot be separated from his words, neither by the passage of time, which, as we learn through Dōgen, is not just “goings and comings,” and nor through a constructed or imagined distance between subject and object. We are inexorably connected to Heraclitus through the Word or *logos*, that is everliving and omnipresent.

Heeding Dōgen’s advice to ‘personally investigate such facts with clarity and diligence’ Kasulis is able to realise the simultaneous forces of esoteric and discursive language at work in the *Shōbōgenzō* and bringing his whole self as his ‘own “half which exists through intimacy”’ he encounters or “molts” with Dōgen to complete the text:

In a remarkable sense, the *Shōbōgenzō* is Dōgen’s own presence – a discursive account of his own self-knowledge as presence and also the intimate presence of Dōgen himself, in oneness of body-mind (*shinjin ichinyo*). To separate Dōgen (the physical presence) from his ideas (his mental presence) is to deny that oneness.

Historically the approach to the cosmic fragments has been through the back door of Ionian physics and from this contextual entry point the philosophy and cosmology of Heraclitus is critiqued and compared. Graham’s pivotal positioning of Heraclitus as ‘the most articulate and philosophically sophisticated interpreter of Ionian philosophy’ helps open new doors to our perception of what Heraclitus could be doing. As Graham contends, he is very aware of the implications and shortcomings of Ionian philosophy, particularly where the cosmogonic theories of a generating substance lead; nowhere. He is known to scorn most of the developing sciences and those who expound their virtues; he has a healthy scepticism towards the benefits of writing, though with prudent measure not writing it off altogether, D. 59 The way of writing is straight and crooked, and perennially alludes to a species

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275 Graham, *Explaining the Cosmos*, 145.
276 Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments*, 41. I happen to prefer the least popular interpretation of this fragment, that of Kirk, and Robinson following him, that relates the disputed instrument ‘carding wheel’ of antiquity to the path of the pen – as the alphabet is indeed made up of both straight and crooked marks and words can both bend and straighten meaning. I find this interpretation most apposite within the overall context of Heraclitus’ thought.
of absolute (in the form of the *logos*) that is inherent in all and yet beyond them. He thus infers a kind of “trans-descendence,” as it might be termed in context of the Kyoto School philosophers, to comprehend or experience the cosmic totality within the particular ripple each individual casts into the greater current of natural order. The notional conjecture I put forward, demonstrable only through attainment in the ‘skin, flesh, bones and marrow,’” is that the aphoristic riddles through which Heraclitus communicates his astounding wisdom can be experienced in another dimension of linguistic activity akin to that transmitted through the *Shōbōgenzō*. Hee-Jin Kim recommends one participate in the symbolic play and artistic modulations of Dōgen’s diction which ‘stand for the infinite versatility of a seamless reality’ rather than ‘restate them in more facile language.’ These lexical pirouettes are nothing short of ‘an indispensable part of the spiritual discipline demanded by the logic of the Buddha-dharma.’

In An Address to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities titled “Will to Believe” James contends that faith is, as much as anything else, tied to the will, exactly as would be any scientific postulate. The likeliness or un-likeness of the result is in effect predetermined belief. Thus he wonders why, with so much contradictory evidence and assumption with every aspect of thought or ‘fact’ we do not realise that it is not the result that reveals the matter but rather the query:

“There is this,—there is that; there is indeed nothing which some-one has not thought absolutely true, while his neighbour deemed it absolutely false; and not an absolutist among them seems ever to have considered that the trouble may all the time be essential, and that the intellect, even with truth directly in its grasp, may have no infallible signal for knowing whether it be truth or no.”

The nature of truth is the theme of “Socrates’s Second Speech” in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Madness is considered the privileged first order of communication with

277 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-Eye Treasury*, 50. The significance of this phrase is explored more deeply in the second episode.
279 Ibid., 81, nt. 19.
280 Ibid., nt 17.
divine truth. Anything pertaining to human reasoning alone is secondary. The truth is said to lie in ‘that region beyond,’ yet another reference to the mythical Hyperborea ‘the land beyond’ and from where, if we can catch the whispered trail of Apollo’s arrow like ‘whatever soul has followed in the train of a god and has caught sight of any truth’ we may be initiated into admission. The truth is beyond the song ‘of our earthly poets,’ ineffable and incomprehensible and ‘It is in this great beyond that Reality lives, without shape or colour, intangible, visible only to reason, the soul’s pilot; and all true knowledge is knowledge of her.’ Apart from the fact that it is ‘visible only to reason’ we could be gazing on the field of śūnyatā.

Every “skin-bag” is residence to varying degrees of perception and levels of experience. The truly subjective nature of truth is communicated through the very bone and marrow of the Venerable Bodhidharma. In the fascicle Kattō (The Complicated) Dōgen retells the story of the discussion of the twenty-eighth patriarch (Bodhidharma) with his disciples as he knowingly draws near to his death. Prima facie it appears to be a typical solicitation of ascendency, holder of the winning ticket, he who draws nearest, but no, ‘everyone’s a winner…that’s the truth (yes, the truth).’ But each disciple receives the transmission of the Patriarch in a distinct way. After hearing the words of the Patriarch (Bodhidharma), the first disciple Dōfuku says, ‘My view now is, without being attached to words or being detached from words, to perform the function of truth’ and Bodhidharma replies, ‘You have got my skin.’ After the four disciples present have expressed their particular responses, all different, the honourable title of Second Patriarch is bestowed upon one of them, Eka, who attained the “marrow.” As Dōgen then elucidates ‘The Patriarch’s expression is utterly consistent, but this does not necessarily mean that the four understandings are the same’ and furthermore, if the assembly of listening monks had been hundreds then along with the speech would have been hundreds of expressions for the receiving of the words, not just the ‘skin, flesh, bones and marrow’ equated to the four disciples present, in fact, ‘there would be no limit.’

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283 Ibid., 30.
284 This is a Zen term used by Dōgen denoting the human body.
285 Hot Chocolate, ‘Every 1’s a Winner,’ 1978. Released on album of same title in same year with label RAK.
There is no erroneous approach, just different entry points. Lack of clarity invites experience ‘knowledge-how’ that a slap, prod or the odd skull crack sometimes necessitate. That which though unequivocally experienced, is not available for review by conceptual thought. The same viewpoint is notable in the readings advanced by Graham and Benitez of the Heraclitean fragments, in that the process of extracting meaning is just as if not more than important than the multiple meanings that any one fragment may proffer.

Truth is an individual stage of learning. It varies in depth and texture. Understanding the bone is right understanding, understanding the marrow is right understanding. Like the learning of the way of the Buddha is learning the way of the self in Genjōkōan (Manifesting Suchness), it is individual. Or explained even more forcefully, under the tutelage of the famous Zen master Lin-chi who says, ‘If you meet a Buddha, kill him; if you meet a patriarch, kill him; if you meet a sage, kill him; if you meet your father or mother, kill them; if you meet your relatives, kill them.’

Very thorough, not so nice and tidy. We must annihilate all learning and all knowing to encounter the true way. The tug of a tale end of truth with a sceptic’s grip will paradoxically allow us to rise up out of the dank swamp of doubt into the light of unknowing.

In his key work De Docta Ignorantia (1440) and its companion piece De Coniecturis written shortly after (1442-3), Cusanus sets forth the premise that any assertion of truth can be nothing but conjecture and furthermore is subject to endless change and metamorphoses, in short, ‘precise truth is unattainable…The consequence is that any human positive assertion of the truth is conjecture, for the increase of the attaining of truth is inexhaustible.’

Whilst Cusanus makes it unequivocally clear that the science of precise truth (much like “exact conclusions”) is ‘humanly unattainable’ by doing so he at the same time determines absolute truth as the privileged province of God. Rather than damming all human speculation to meaningless vacuity as such an outlook may imply, this

287 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 262-263.
‘quantum leap’\textsuperscript{289} in the thought of Cusanus means instead to forge a relationship between the creative forces of the divine and the mind of man as the instrument of the divine. When the human mind speculates, the conjectures put forward by it are the form of its participation ‘in the fecundity of the creative nature’ of God.\textsuperscript{290}

In emphasizing the creative powers of both the divine and human he begins to shape a cosmologic order that is self-generating and co-expressive. Such a cosmological view has distinct Heraclitean over-tones and precedes the self-determining co-dynamic world structure instituted by Nishida in his final essay “The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview.” Cusanus creates a symbolism based on a natural numerical flux. This is expressed through his concentric circles of \textit{De Ludo Globi} and in the representation of unity in \textit{De Coniecturis} through a more complicated diagrammatic representation from which the simpler patterning of the \textit{ludus globi} is derived.\textsuperscript{291} The workings of natural flux are of course very reminiscent of Heraclitus and the manifold possibilities of human conjecture. Truth suppositions flow as does the infinitely mutable course of a running river.

13. Light

\textit{The hallowed light of learning, the illumination that comes, like a flash of light in the darkest night as a lightning bolt through the profoundest darkness, and saved by the glorious incandescence of certain knowing, we close another opening to doubt, we securely plug the mountain tunnel down to the murky depths of sinful ignorance, we close another opening...}

\textit{But what is that soft glow we can barely perceive, that we do not know?}

Ambiguity is uncomfortable, we like to know what is in the light, what is shaded, what should be in the dark, what is meant to be lit, no half wattage, certainly not in the fluorescence of the present technological age. Understanding things is determined by the clarity in which we see things, illumination is never said to be cloudy or subfusc, it is radiant and dazzling. But it is also said to be blinding. In fact

\textsuperscript{289} Cusanus, \textit{De Ludo Globi}, 19.
\textsuperscript{290} Ibid. This quote is taken from Watt’s translation of \textit{De Coniecturis}.
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid., 31.
the blinding type is of the highest order, the truly transformative. As if to really
understand we must be rid of the sensory faculties, rise above their helpful yet
limited ways.

Heraclitus counsels that Fr. D. 55 Whatever comes from sight, hearing,
learning from experience: this I prefer. Typically this is not just a straight forward
appraisal of the senses nor does it favour specifically empirical methods but must be
read in context with other fragments, some of which would seem to contradict what
he is saying here if the fragment is not considered alongside the other thematically
related statements. He is also implying that we have the necessary tools inherent
within us to understand things (even though we unceasingly fail to comprehend) and
that the experience gleaned from our own encounters with the world is sufficient.
Polymathy and great recondite learning are not necessarily the proven methods yet,
Fr. D. 107 Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not
understand the language. Thus the senses, like the ‘imaginal spirit’ of the Šūfī
mundus imaginalis cannot get us into the unseen world though they can certainly get
us nearer. The vestibule area, no closer.

Here Nishitani quietly interjects, putting forward a small lamp of his own to
soften the hard edges of exclusion in the antechamber. The true natural light is not
that of reason as it has come to be known, but the ‘light of each and every thing.’
From neither the fields of senses nor reason is the concentrated point of light that is
the middle mode of being of things able to be apprehended in a non-objectifiable
mode. From the fields of reason and sense, which orbit around the resplendent heart,
‘the centre is always seen from the circumference.’

When the ‘fruitless threshing around of the mind to grasp itself, winds
down to more of a rustle (it can’t be expected to stop altogether), it approaches a
unity of being that extends out beyond itself and settles in what Nishitani terms the

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292 Fr. D. 40 Much learning does not teach understanding. For it would have taught Hesiod and
Pythagoras, and also Xenophanes and Hecataeus. Fr. D. 42 Homer deserves to be expelled from the
competition and beaten with a staff – and Archilochus too! Fr. D. 129 Pythagoras son of Mnesarchus
pursued inquiry further than all other men and, choosing what he liked from these compositions, made
a wisdom of his own: much learning, artful knavery. But then, just to keep us on our toes, Fr. D. 35
Men who love wisdom must be good inquirers into many things indeed.
293 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 140.
294 Ibid., 144.
‘knowing of non-knowing.’ The same energy wasting activities that Fujisawa describes of the mind are recognised by Nishitani in our frustrated efforts to know the self, ‘where, in our attempts to grasp the self, we get caught in its grasp.’ In the turn away from a self-centred mode of being in order to re-orientate ourselves to the “middle” of things, boundaries wibble into formlessness, a light of dappled dazzle soaks and absorbs, and our abiding and obstinate grasp is weakened as we dissolve into a form of non-form.

Derrida traces the origins of language through a lingering of carbon and a vestigial flotsam of the unspoken and happens upon ‘a concentration of light as a result of seeing in order not to see.’ Perhaps this is the light of true seeing, a light immanent in all things and that is seen only from the centre of the very thing itself, from its “middle,” which in fact cannot be seen at all. This star of disproportionate magnitude, this concentration of light that bedazzles us with its transcendent phosphorescence, also touches Nishitani’s knowing of non-knowing with its radiant glow. Indeed, for Nishitani, they are the very same thing; ‘What we call the knowing of non-knowing is, as it were, the gathering together and concentration on a single point of the light of all things.’

After a thoroughgoing dismissal of any thinking that presumes to know or distinguish “this” from “that” or “right” from “wrong” Chuang Tzu directs us to the only light of reason whose axis is entirely free of opposition. By this light all comes into identity, beyond relativity, comparison and conflict. It is the light of Nature and by its illumination does the sage proceed. It was by similar reasoning that brought Cusanus to the light of learned ignorance. He realised that all judgements are formed by means of a comparative relation and that which cannot be compared is therefore unknowable. Since the incomparable, in other words God, is really the only worthy pursuit of knowledge then we must content ourselves with knowledge of our own very particular form of ignorance, and thus, ‘the more he knows that he is unknowing, the more learned he will be.’ These revelations, as we have remarked else-where, came to him on a sea voyage, under the auspicious guidance of the light

296 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 140.
297 Ibid.
299 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 140.
300 Wing-tsit, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, 183.
of Nature and again we have considered Chuang Tzu and Cusanus under the same light.

14. Pure Experience and Withness

The philosophies of William James and Nishida Kitarō are both marked by a deep and authentic personal interest in religious experience. The ideas of pure and direct experience that they developed are the progeny of inquiries inspired by the ineffable and meta-rational reality of the apophatic. Emergent from the lived and cogitative explorations of their respective philosophies are the related ideas of a subsuming universal that overcomes distinctions between subject and object. What one calls a conjunctive relation which acts as a connector between experiences the other might call a knowing by becoming. The significance of either of their approaches, which cannot be lumped together in the wholesale manner this précis threatens to do, and the reason for my returning interest, especially in Nishida with regards to the elusive subject of this thesis, is the curious assimilation of object and subject which to my mind is one of the most resounding auguries of a thinking that leaves behind knowing for a knowing of non-knowing, or learned ignorance, and which undoubtedly will at some ungiven moment in the augenblick of nunc stans beckon the flag ship of coincidentia oppositorum and ride off into the shimmering Isness of absolute nothingness to unite with an opposite.

In A World of Pure Experience from his series of essays in radical empiricism, James notes a piquing unrest with the inadequacies of the philosophical atmosphere at the time of his writing and proposes a type of personal Weltanschauung, which he names “radical empiricism,” in response to these urgencies and issues. As we have mentioned, it was the ideas that emerged from this Weltanschauung that were to greatly inspire Nishida’s earliest forray into the philosophical literary scene with his An Inquiry into the Good. James presents the idea of a varied “withness” as an imperfect intimacy between disparate parts and experiences as ‘contingent relations’ which ultimately form a greater unity of both disconnections and connections. He likens the universe and our independent individual experiences of it to a dried human head, the type which ‘the Dyaks of Borneo deck their lodges,’ and from which float and dangle ‘innumerable feathers,
leaves, strings, beads, and loose appendices of every description."\textsuperscript{301} This colourful assortment of livery represents the gallimaufry of subjective experiences that ‘float and dangle’ off the shrivelled cerebrum ‘for the most part out of sight and irrelevant and unimaginable to one another.’\textsuperscript{302}

The significance of James’s notion of ‘pure experience’ for Nishida, did not, however, have anything to do with this adventurous décor. In fact, you could rather say that it represented the shortcomings of James’s theory for Nishida, which lay in its emphasis on the outward expression of experience. A grasp ‘not from within but from without,’ in Masao Abe’s assessment, misses the true reality of pure experience. The true pure experience must be a living unobservable actuality that is ‘individual and yet trans-individual and universal.’\textsuperscript{303} The idea of a direct unmediated experience prior to any division between subject and object is still the basis of James’s pure experience but Nishida’s criticism of it was that it became too psychological and generalised to really be the undifferentiated experience that Nishida was able to later explain through the basho structuring of progressive fields or loci that encapsulate without ever objectifying the self – and therefore all experience. None-the-less James helped paved the way towards the ultimate looping of the basho structure with his ideas of “withness” and the “conjunctive relation.” James’s conjunctive relation emphasises a continuity of experience which allows the passing of one experience to merge into the next, from one subject to another, from object to subject and subject to object, so that ‘within each of our personal histories, subject, object, interest and purpose are continuous or may be continuous.’\textsuperscript{304}

15. Absolute Nothingness

Absolute nothingness, the fundamental Buddhist standpoint as espoused by the Kyoto School philosophers is its own perplexing yet thoroughly simple domain (perplexing for this reason) that should not strictly be appropriated into the fellowship of the unknown here for the purposes of augmenting the argument. Never-the-less I am taking the liberty of alliance with this standpoint of all standpoints as yet another

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{303} Masao Abe in the introduction to Kitarō Nishida, \textit{An Inquiry into the Good}, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), xv.
\textsuperscript{304} Williams James, \textit{Essays in Radical Empiricism}, 48.
means of articulating something of what I contend the unknown to feel, be, appear and dis-appear like.

There is no subject-object dichotomy in absolute nothingness, nor separation, distinctions or dualities. The obtainment of this effulgent ekstasis according to Nishitani is not a matter of unifying opposing elements, it is ‘neither a monism nor a dualism’ but rather ‘It is the absolute one, the absolute self-identity of the absolute two: the home-ground on which we are what we are in our self-nature and the home-ground on which things are what they are in themselves.’ On this homeground of absolute nothingness the creative declaration ‘I am that’ is also possible. It is not a dead space of no return but a living force.

A relative nothingness can be shown. It is only a relative nothingness that can be shown. An absolute nothingness cannot exist in the world for it is not of the world. It can only be suggested by describing what is in the world that it is not. Absolute nothingness is an Is not a Not, though it is not. Absolute nothingness is the being and source of all things, it is the esse over existence that Aquinas speaks of, the ultimate basho of Nishida as a universal of universals, the all-comprehensive infinity of Bruno, the godhead of Eckhart. Relative nothingness is a human apprehension of itself in space and time. Anything that is not absolute is apprehended by the subject from a standpoint within space and time where the dichotomy of the subject and object holds reign.

Within relative nothingness there can exist the appearance or suggestion of an absolute. When what is perceived around us, as in all perception is understood to be a function of relative existence, we can begin to see through the veil of reality into the infinite depths of its possibilities grounded in absolute nothingness.

In confrontation with the nothingness inherent in all things the strictures of perceived reality dissolve into a giddying vortex that eliminates all duality and nurtures the almost impossible possibility of understanding by becoming. This is not a non-being but an all-being where there is no separation between things and beings. It is an all-inclusive neutralising balance, a shimmery equilibrium between all forces present.

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306 Ibid.
a. The presence of absolute nothingness

James Heisig describes ‘the illumination’ brought to him by the profound insights of the Kyoto School of philosophers as an awakening transmitted to him in ‘sparks’ and ‘flickers.’ It seems appropriate that like the ghostly remains of a fire, a hot contender in the originative substance debate, absolute nothingness, intangible and unknowable is apprehended through the flickering flame of suggestion and metaphor. One such flame, long subdued and leaving only its untraceable remains is the image given to us by Derrida and the infamous cinder. It is not difficult to read the presence of absolute nothingness in the name of this ‘being that there is but which…is nothing.’

I understand that the cinder is nothing that can be in the world, nothing that remains as an entity [etant]. It is the being [l'être], rather, that there is — this is a name of the being that there is but which, giving itself [es gibt ashes], is nothing, remains beyond everything that is [konis epekeina ousias], remains unpronounceable in order to make saying possible although it is nothing.

Absolute nothingness is not however, a metaphor. It isn’t any thing. There is no similitude for it either. It is everything. Aquinas asks ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ Heidegger opens his monumental Introduction to Metaphysics with what he considers to be the fundamental question of metaphysics ‘Why are there Essents (Existents, Seiend) rather than nothing? That is the question.’ ‘Why are there cinders rather than nothing?’ echoes Ned Lukacher editor and translator of Derrida’s Cinders. These questions house a presumed contradiction between something and nothing. The is and the is not are butted against each other as if there can only be one or the other. From an Eastern perspective this would be considered typical of Western thinking which separates materialism and

308 Derrida, Cinders, 73.
311 Derrida, Cinders, 1.
spirituality, wherein the two tendencies of thought are so incompatible they speak over each other in language codes undecipherable to the other.

Sartre determines being as absolutely positive and positions nothingness as its negative contradiction. His nothingness ‘haunts’ being, it has a borrowed existence that it gets from being, it is in other words a non-being, that has arisen from being and ‘exists only on the surface of being.’ He sees nothingness as subsequent to being and warns against positing ‘nothingness as an original abyss from which being arose.’ He critiques G. W. F. Hegel’s (1770-1831) approach to nothingness, which is more inclined to see nothingness as an indeterminable emptiness, indeed as empty as pure being, and he strives to correct Hegel’s thinking by asserting ‘that being is and that nothingness is not.’ This is the kind of thinking that forewarns of a self-immanent self-prehension that Nishitani rebukes when he states ‘nothingness is not a “thing” that is nothingness.’

Whilst Nishitani says complete nothingness means the absolute negation of person that is because it ‘becomes one with it.’ “Person” is not then caught up in the difficulty of affirming what one is, a difficulty that might result in statements like ‘at once that I am what I have been’ when in denial of the absolute nothingness that lies at the ground of all being. Where we are led by Nishitani is away from the illusory appearances of a self engaged ‘in a process of unlimited self-determination’ and as Heisig puts it to ‘the restoration of subjectivity from its source (which) means a return to this life in a nothingness beyond being.’

In contrast with the Kantian premiss, also followed by Sartre, that distinguishes the phenomenon with the thing-in-itself, Nishitani’s idea of ‘person as a “phenomenon”’ is person as a real manifestation that lies somewhere in the middle of illusion and emptiness. What lies behind the phenomenon of person or ‘mask of persona,’ is not the thing-in-itself as Kant and Sartre suggest but absolute nothingness. Absolute nothingness is not to be thought of as separate or something other than person but exactly what person is. In this sense persona becomes a mask

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313 Ibid., 15.
314 Ibid.
315 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 70.
316 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 58.
319 Ibid., 69.
but there is nothing other which is real or authentic behind the mask. The mask of persona is the surface crystallization of being.

What is behind person according to Nishitani is true emptiness. The awareness of true emptiness is the simultaneous manifestation of true emptiness and our true self-nature as self-awareness. This is like the simultaneous realisation and generation of reality; reality is literally being realized, in the double sense of the word.

True emptiness is nothing less than what reaches awareness in all of us as our own absolute self-nature. In addition, this emptiness is the point at which each and every entity that is said to exist becomes manifest: as what it is in itself, in the Form of its true suchness. 320

For Sartre ‘nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being – like a worm.’321 He tempers this healthy condition with the human attitudes he considers to be a “comprehension” of nothingness: hate, prohibitions, regret, etc.’ Ultimately he describes the phenomenon of nothingness as ‘anguish.’322 This “anguish,” I would say is the encountering of nothing when looking for the self, but it is not absolute nothingness.

β. Absolute nothingness as absolute reality

Of reality one can hardly speak with any authority except to oneself. The irregularities of interpretation can never be eliminated. Jung defines reality as an entirely individual prerogative in The Undiscovered Self ‘the distinctive thing about real facts, however, is their individuality’ he says, and ‘one could say that the real picture consists of nothing but exceptions to the rule, and that, in consequence absolute reality has predominantly the character of irregularity.’323 Following the thinking of the Kyoto philosophers “reality” is nothing other than absolute nothingness, ‘the world of being that rests on the nihility of the self and all things is only a relative manifestation of nothingness as it is encountered in reality. Beneath

320 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 106.
321 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 21.
322 Ibid., 17.
that world, all around it, there is an encompassing absolute nothingness that is reality.\(^\text{324}\)

Sartre’s nothingness that ‘haunts’ being, Jung’s “character of irregularity” Nishitani’s mask of persona, are all manifest aspects of the illusory nature of being and reality. Reality is rendered a surface appearance, an illusion beyond which lies the true substanceless reality of absolute nothingness.

Without venturing into a dissection of the nature of reality but rather by navigating past its surface to the flicker of beyond, into a “knowing of non-knowing,” where being is in unison with emptiness, where knowledge and ignorance converge, only there can we catch a glimmer of what absolute nothingness as a reality is, for as Beckett bemoans ‘Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic.’\(^\text{325}\)

\(\gamma\). Meaningful meaninglessness from a standpoint of absolute nothingness

When reality is conceived from a perspective of relativity the ever present observer becomes aware of itself being aware of itself and hence then should also be aware that it is unable to perceive anything beyond itself. From here the subject is greeted with a self-reflecting reality that very soon loses any vestiges of meaning and spirals inwards to encounter the coiled worm of Sartre’s relative nothingness lying at the heart of all being.

Searching for the origin of nothingness, Sartre concludes that as nothingness ‘lacks all relation’\(^\text{326}\) with being, so cannot be in opposition to being, nor its negation, nor any consequence of being whatsoever, but yet has to come from somewhere where being is, it must then come from a type of being that is its own nothingness. He marvels at how we might come to encounter such a rare flower, ‘It remains to learn in what delicate, exquisite region of Being we shall encounter that Being which is its own Nothingness.’\(^\text{327}\)

For Sartre it seems that being has more the quality of what the Kyoto school conception of absolute nothingness is and everything accordingly is conditioned by

\(^{324}\) Heisig, *The Philosophers of Nothingness*, 220.


\(^{326}\) Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 22.

\(^{327}\) Ibid., 23.
the appearance of this absolutely positive being, nothingness included. Sartre states the act of doubt in human reality, that is the act of questioning, affects a withdrawal from being ‘as one who questions, disengages himself from being’ and it is this disengagement, this withdrawal, that allows nothingness to arise in the world. By this reasoning Sartre allows nothingness to exist without it affecting being. Whilst this doctrine stands in sharp contrast to the unifying principle that underlies the conceptual (at very least) understanding of absolute nothingness that I have strived to elaborate in the slipstream of the Great Wave, Nishitani, in my view it still bears within it the very thing that it determines cannot exist in relation with it. What I mean is the unavoidable presence of absolute nothingness. I am using “presence” here much like Derrida uses “cinder” or “ashes,” names that ‘are as good as any other.’ So, it is not a real presence, which would imply being, but perhaps more an ‘is been,’ a presence that would be better described by using the trace structure of Derrida than giving it a name.

16. Mysterium Tremendum

In his analysis of the phenomenon of mysterium Rudolf Otto attempts to describe what in religious terms would be called ‘wholly other’ which, he continues, ‘falls quite outside the limits of the “canny,” and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.’ Otto looks to St. Augustine’s Confessions to illustrate the ‘benumbing’ effect of the wholly other ‘before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.’ So not only are we cold, sensually frozen but we are incapable of cognitive recourse. The power of this mysterium tremendum is such that even in allowing for the ‘certain irremovable

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328 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 24.
329 Derrida, Cinders, 1.
330 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 22. This term, which is a direct translation of the French “est ete”, apparently makes as little sense in French as it does in English according to Hazel E. Barnes, the translator of the edition of Being and Nothingness that I refer to. As such, Barnes has elected to replace the original “is been”, which is somewhat controversial due to its senselessness with, “is made-to-be”. To use Sartre’s own terminology in contradiction to its intended meaning is a somewhat convoluted gesture on my part to emphasize the point that within the structure of his argument against Being and Nothingness having any coherent relation to each other is the unavoidable evidence of absolute nothingness which is inherent in all things and being, even in ‘the notion of Being as full positivity’ that Sartre says particularly ‘lacks all relation with it (nothingness).’
332 Ibid. 26.
limits’ of our knowledge, it renders us impercipient. He is careful to clarify that the
effect, contrary to its seeming negative stupefaction has a positive ‘feeling-content’
to distinguish it from nihilism or despair. John Harvey, a translator of The Idea of
the Holy, finds in Pascal a quote most befitting in summary of Otto’s viewpoint; ‘If
one subjects everything to reason our religion will lose its mystery and its
supernatural character. If one offends the principles of reason our religion will be
absurd and ridiculous…There are two equally dangerous extremes, to shut reason out
and to let nothing else in.’

17. Becoming Nothing: On Love as Knowing

Worthy of utmost honour for continuing to be the most truly mysterious and
unknowable yet paradoxically, common to all, event, if we may call it that, in the co-
dynamic, if we may make that considered agreement, creative expression of life, the
universe and everything, love, deserves a spot.

What makes up the final chapter of An Inquiry into the Good was not
originally intended for the book at all according to Nishida. He has nonetheless
appended it for its relation to the general thoughts preceding. It is titled “Knowledge
and Love.” In it he explicitly relates the activities and unity of love and knowledge.
This brief addendum could be some of the plainest spoken rhetoric Nishida gives us,
as Kasulis laments; ‘It is regrettable that Nishida never fully recaptured some of the
clarity and simplicity of the prose he used in A Study of Good.’ The simplicity of
the prose belies the most bewildering of themes, those of love and knowledge.
Nishida wishes to dispute the long held supposition that knowledge and love stem
from entirely different faculties: that ne’er the twain shall meet and any betrothal of
the two will assuredly end in annulment. Indeed it is the inherent compatibility of the
subjects that Nishida makes most plain in his ensuing and very short, at barely three
pages long, summary of the monster topic. Notwithstanding, a familiarity with
Nishida’s particular sympathies towards knowledge is essential to this bold

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334 John Harvey, Introduction to The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the
idea of the divine and its relation to the rational, by Rudolf Otto, trans. John W. Harvey (London:
(Winter, 1989): 325
declaration of union. True knowledge comes with the elimination of distinction between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject. We must, in other words, ‘eliminate our own delusions and conjectures – that is, idiosyncratic subjective factors – and thereby unite with the true nature’ of our object.\textsuperscript{336} Only through the union of subject and object can we come into knowledge of the true nature of a thing. This process is readily translatable to the somewhat rarefied and ideal movement of loving union, in that ‘to love something is to cast away the self and unite with that other.’\textsuperscript{337} This would be a knowing by becoming. Al-Ghazālī relates the very same process of unification through the immersive state of love but in his terminology ‘it is called “extinction from extinction,”’ since the possessor of the state is extinct from himself and from his own extinction.’ The possessor of this state has been fully unified, has arrived on the ‘absolute near side,’\textsuperscript{338} as the wine and cup, so to speak, ‘As if there is wine and no glass, or glass and no wine.’\textsuperscript{339}

The indefatigable forces of love also inspire an unexpected about turn for Qfwfq. His turn towards nothingness is a significant step towards the extinction of consciousness that precedes the declaration of unity. Impelled by love he reconsiders the marvels and novelties of being and his ‘excessive enthusiasm for the glories of the universe’ to meet the faultless clarity of the featureless void:

it was true that there was an absoluteness about the void, a rigour, a presence such as to make everything that claimed to have the requisites for existence seem approximate, limited, shaky; if one starts to draw comparisons between what is and what is not, it is the poorer qualities of the former that strike you, the impurities, the flaws; in short, you can only really feel safe with nothingness.\textsuperscript{340}

Christian Mysticism invokes love as an assured passage for the souls yearning. San Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591) describes a ten rung ladder of love by which we ascend to God. In \textit{The Dark Night of the Soul} he immerses us in the anguish of a soul tormented by separation but then soars to the ecstatic heights of the incomprehensible beyond in glorious betrothal with Our Love. The earlier and lesser

\textsuperscript{336} Nishida, \textit{An Inquiry into the Good}, 173.
\textsuperscript{337} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{339} Al-Ghazālī, \textit{The Niche of Lights}, 18.
\textsuperscript{340} Calvino, \textit{The Complete Cosmicomics}, 380.
known French Beguine mystic, Margaret Porette (died 1310) writes a most moving incantation of the illuminating forces of love in her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. The ideas contained within far too threatening for the Inquisition, who in their eminent wisdom had her burnt at the stake.

In *The Cloud of Unknowing*, by an anonymous late fourteenth century English author, it is through love alone that we can pierce the cloud of unknowing that lies between us and God. Love is not merely the passage through the cloud of unknowing but is also what is encountered on the other side. It is through the unknown and infinite capacity of love that we can abide in harmonious unity with divine will, and divine will *is* love.

To pierce the cloud of unknowing one must cast aside all thoughts, conceptions, desires, deeds, sins, regrets et al ‘and abandon them beneath a cloud of forgetting.'\(^{341}\) The “cloud of forgetting” bares a marked resemblance to Dōgen’s “dropping off of body and mind.” In another dominion, stealing out into ‘the dark night’ San Juan, casting off his body and mind, rejoices at the blessed union as he pierces the cloud of unknowing through his abandonment “beneath a cloud of forgetting,” ‘I abandoned and forgot myself, laying my face on my Beloved; all things ceased; I went out from myself, leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.’\(^{342}\)

Mo Tzu, a contemporary (and opponent) of Confucius, expounds a doctrine of universal love. Mo Tzu believed in a ‘want of mutual love’ which was promoted for its beneficial results. The main difference between Mo Tzu and Confucius was that of an idealism inherent in Confucianism as opposed to a practical approach found in Moism. Therefore an idea like universal love in Confucianism would have a moral precept attached to it that was grounded in the goodness of humanity whereas in Moism it would be to assure benefits here on Earth and also importantly to please Heaven. Mo-tzu’s love may not have the absolute nature of that as espoused in *The Cloud of Unknowing* where-in it could be said that love whilst certainly being the assured passage through the unknown it is also the unknown itself and the ultimate absolute.

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Added merely as an addendum to his book, one could easily mistake the issue of Nishida’s “Knowledge and Love” as more of an afterthought, or a point that needed concession but was not worthy of full development, or perhaps, and this I prefer, a matter of such importance it stands alone, or alongside, or like a caboose at the end, the best place to be with full view of the infinitely diminishing landscape. Like Beckett’s addendum to Watt, which contains what Beckett hints to be the principal substance of the book, directing his reader to carefully study the ‘illuminating material’ and which apart from his claims that ‘fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation’\textsuperscript{343} perhaps its matter was of another aspect, too refined, though not quite ‘out of existence’\textsuperscript{344} to fit with the body of the book. Perhaps the addendum is like a little light house, sending out its beam of love, poised between worlds, ready for unification but not quite willing to let go, thinking it has something to protect, an idea it believes in, and so it remains attached.

Believing still in formal consistency, I end the first episode with this little addendum on love, its place reserved \textit{in perpetuum} in the great unknown.

\textsuperscript{343} Beckett, \textit{Watt}, 247.
\textsuperscript{344} Beckett, \textit{Disjecta}, 27.
Enter Chorus. They transcribe through floating movements of the limbs a circle and its centre in search of each other, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and a circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, or a circle and a centre not its centre in search of its centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time. *

Second Episode

Methods of Meeting in Unknowing

*The Odd at Sea*
II

Methods of Meeting in Unknowing

The Odd at Sea

Beckett on how to read Joyce: ‘you complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read…his writing is not about something; it is that something itself.’

Adorno on metaphysical thinking: ‘For thought there is really no other possibility, no other opportunity, than to do what the miner’s adage forbids: to work one’s way through the darkness without a lamp…and to immerse oneself in the darkness as deeply as one possibly can.’

Heidegger on language: ‘It therefore might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand.’

Cusanus on ignorance: ‘Then, whilst we are groping in the dark, our ignorance will enlighten us in an incomprehensible fashion and enable us to form a more correct and truer notion of the Absolute.’

Directions from Dōgen: ‘An ancient buddha said, “Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.” These words do not mean mountains are mountains; they mean mountains are mountains. Therefore investigate mountains thoroughly.’

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Although it may read suspiciously like it, this is not meant as a testimony to all the obscure and misunderstood writers and thinkers of history. As a contemporary translator and interpreter grappling with the difficulties of delivering one of those obscure writers (Dōgen), Thomas Kasulis remarks on the domination in 20th century philosophy of a preoccupation with language. The limits and boundaries of language have been probed and scrutinised, explored, tested, stretched, denied, challenged and extended. It has been discovered through Wittgenstein that the limits of our world are the same as those of our language: apophthegm 5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. What this means is that not only are we unable to discover the intractable and unexplored unexpected, as Heraclitus foresaw, Fr. D. 18 He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored; but we are incapable of even the most basic expression of this incapacity. We are unable to conceive of anything outside of the boundaries of our own knowing. These boundaries keep things in and out. The contained effects the uncontainable and unexplored.

The flow according to Socrates as he states in the Theaetetus is strictly one way; ‘it is impossible for something known to be unknown, or for something unknown to be known.’ From Wittgenstein we have the same sentiment in apophthegm 5.61…We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either. As the Socratic adage goes, we can only know that we do not know. But this knowing of not-knowing does not contain all that is not known, it does not bring us any closer to knowing that which is not known. By that I mean the declaration of not knowing does not suddenly open up the frontiers of hitherto inaccessible data to the individual, and nor does it open up the individual to the hitherto inaccessible boggling infinitude of data. Frontiers, whether crossed or not, are still part of a delineated realm of the knowable and sayable.

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Moving constantly towards understanding only extends the territorial dimensions of knowing, moving away from understanding on the other hand – that is, utterable comprehension and comprehensible utterance of the apprehended thing or idea - will close the distance considerably. The boundaries of culture, history and philosophy are contained by the language that they in turn create. ‘There is no knowledge which can repudiate its mediations; it can only reflect them.’

Language is the mediator between external phenomenon and more problematically the external mediator for an inexpressible immanence. The solving of a problem or “riddle” does not mean the end of that problem or riddle, but merely stimulates the reformulation of it into a new configuration.

The problem and its contingent resolution – which resides as a part within – will disperse and converge ad infinitum whilst caught in the causal nexus of being and time. It is only outside of this world-nexus that the “riddle” ceases to exist. When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The riddle does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it. Suzuki Teitaro Daisetz writes almost the same thing about the objectifying intellect that beholds reality always separate and outside of itself; ‘when the intellect apprehends its own way of moving out into questioning, the questioning will be the answering and the answer will be directly discovered in the question.’

I propose to call this perpetual motion of question and answer, after Wittgenstein, ansking. This is Beckett’s hermetically sealed surface of reality in verbal action.

Only when unchained from the asphyxiating stranglehold of ansking does the fresh breeze and “mystery of a strange sky” penetrate into our unknowing without need of riposte, without needing to be housed in knowing. But, it is a rare and very confident intellect that can put itself to rest upon the strange furniture of a new room, for ‘our current habit of living is as incapable of dealing with the mystery of a strange sky or a strange room, with any circumstance unforeseen in her curriculum, as Françoise of conceiving or realising the full horror of a Duval omelette.’

In his lecture series on metaphysics Adorno reminds us of the almost forgotten viewpoint of Wilhelm von Humboldt; ‘that language constitutes thought no

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less than thought language.’ Going against what he purports to be the prevalent view of the times Adorno approaches language as a mediator of thought just as much as thought is considered to be the mediator of language. So from this perspective ‘the historical-philosophical fate of language is at the same time the historical-philosophical fate of the subject matter to which it refers,’ and thus knowledge can only ever reflect and never repudiate the world and subject which motivates its mediation. Though his attempts at defining what his own concept of metaphysics might be came in the form of a repudiation of Wittgenstein’s opening apophthegm to the *Tractatus*, ‘metaphysics is the form of consciousness in which it attempts to know what is more than the case,’ Adorno’s metaphysics is answering to the same ‘spectacular failure of culture’ that I believe Wittgenstein is responding to. Certainly Adorno’s assertion that ‘thought is as much mediated by language as vice versa’ can only be effectively comprehended in the wake of Wittgenstein’s philosophy.

a. Knowing of non-knowing

The sapient individual canny enough to realise their servile condition is not granted immediate liberty for their exertions. But an awareness may begin to unfurl its delicate sensors to the boundlessness of a knowing of *non*-knowing. ‘Pressed to give it a name,’ knowing of non-knowing is what Nishitani calls the point of convergence of all things with the self on the home-ground of śūnyatā. It is where ‘hills, rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones’ are confirmed in ‘their truly elemental and original appearances.’ The field of śūnyatā is where tiles are tiles, trees are trees, the self in self-identity with everything is truly itself as not itself, and there is no difference between anything even though everything is radically and fully in its own suchness. On this field we may not only be more inclined to contemplate “the mystery of a strange sky” but would find ourselves in the very midst of it, amongst the nimbus and crepuscular rays, with the promise of piercing the vaporous

14 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 5. Proposition 1. The world is all that is the case.
either through the mystic ‘cloud of unknowing’ and straight into the hearteye of the unnameable, ‘the god.’

A knowing of non-knowing transcends the dialectic of inquiry. It is not engaged in the same processes of synthesis that drive the unresolved idea towards wholeness, where something morphs from an unknown into a known, or into a known unknown, which would be a knowing of not-knowing. In fact a knowing of non-knowing hardly partakes in the skirmishes of information gathering that occupy the reasoning mind and sense perceptions at all; if enjoined to affiliate it would probably err on the side of being, a being that ‘seems to fade away into bottomlessness.’ A being that is non-reflective and comes about as a self-awareness ‘in a non-objective, “middle” mode of being.’ The non-objective mode of being can only come about on the field of śūnyatā.

In his final analysis Nishitani proffers up the field of śūnyatā as the ultimate homeground where-in all things become possible and which ‘is also the field of absolute freedom.’ The true freedom equated with the field of śūnyatā is beyond the power of the will, beyond any individual exertion of the will that might constitute the type of subjective freedom found in the existentialism of Sartre and the Will of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche for example. It is an utterly pure state (a state of non-state) that is a non-objectifiable being emanating from a middle mode in which everything is encountered in its true suchness through a knowing by becoming and is understood as a realisation (which in Nishitani’s understanding is a realisation as “manifestation-sive-apprehension”) by a knowing of non-knowing. Essential to this magnanimous gesture – the possibility of all things – is the kaleidoscopic spectrum of knowing of non-knowing which issues forth with a centrifugal force from the “middle” mode, distributing with dispassionate equanimity a unifying luminescence of connection permitting the home-ground of all things to be the one and same home-ground of all things.

18 After Kierkegaard’s name for the infinite, the unknown, the absolute. See Søren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments: Johannes Climacus, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985).
19 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 122.
20 Ibid., 159.
21 Ibid., 284.
And on this field of śūnyatā, just as conscious intellectual knowing appears as knowing of non-knowing, all activity and praxis emerge as an ‘action of non-action.’ Furthermore, both praxis and knowledge are manifest as the same standpoint. As the true homeground of all things, Nishitani describes the field of śūnyatā as a force of ‘circuminsessional interpenetration.’ The interactive dependency transcribed in the dynamics of “circuminsessional interpenetration” is a force that moves with the same co-originative arousal that Nishida had established as the basis of his basho: also an ultimate field or locus of absolute freedom. Nishitani’s explication of śūnyatā is indebted to Nishida’s formulations of basho which provided a logical framework for the “trans-descendence” of any opposition between subjectivity and objectivity.

Nishitani’s knowing of non-knowing also resolves all lingering dualisms between subject and object that can only otherwise be expressed through paradoxical logic, ‘such as: “It is not this thing or that, therefore it is this thing or that.” These dualisms are overcome through the “non-cognitive” knowing of becoming that is Nishitani’s version of Cusanus’s docta ignorantia:

The field of emptiness goes beyond both the field of sense intuition and rational thinking; but that does not mean that the subject turns to the object and complies with it, as is the case with sensual realism or dogmatic metaphysics. It pertains to the realization (manifestation-sive-apprehension) of the thing itself, which cannot be apprehended by sensation or reason. This is not cognition of an object but a non-cognitive knowing of the non-objective thing in itself; it is what we might call a knowing of non-knowing, a sort of docta ignorantia.

β. Learned ignorance: the only way to nowhere

Until more recent scholarly interest, Cusanus has perhaps best been known for his early work De Docta Ignorantia. It is in this book that he formally develops the “supreme gift of the Father of Lights” that he infamously received whilst at sea on return from Constantinople to Rome, and from which he shapes his docta ignorantia.

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22 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 122.
23 Ibid., 158.
24 Ibid., 124.
25 Ibid., 139.
ignorantia. It is this insight that guides the trajectory of his life’s work, and so the book has not been emphasised in ignorance, so to speak. Following this light of Lights Cusanus explicates through a language of symbolism and metaphor and using games and crafts, the epiphanic force of his “gift.”

The unexpected inversion of teacher and disciple roles in his Idiota dialogues is one of the various ways Cusanus gives voice to the wisdom of knowing ignorance.\(^{26}\) This reversal recalls the Socratic dialogues of Plato and is also reminiscent of Socrates, Cusanus continues to show his avowed approval and commitment to the perspicacious enlightenment of the docta ignorantia throughout his life and into his final works. This sentiment is clearly stated by Bernard in the later dialogue De Possess, ‘the one who knows that he is unable to know is the more learned,’ and then reaffirmed unequivocally by the Cardinal (Cusanus) in response ‘All, even the most brilliant, will have to say this.’\(^{27}\) One would hardly deign to contradict such vehement assertion and indeed there is very little room for doubt of its sensibility by the end of Cusanus’ corpus. An impressively comprehensive remonstration of the expressibility of real knowledge is submitted in De Sapiente, the first of the Idiota dialogues:

Hence, Wisdom (which all men seek with such great mental longing, since by nature they desire to know) is known in no other way than [through the awareness] that it is higher than all knowledge and is unknowable and is inexpressible by any speech, incomprehensible by any intellect, unmeasurable by any measure, unlimitable by any limit, unboundable by any bounds, disproportional in terms of any proportion, incomparable in terms of any comparison, unfigurable by any befiguring, unformable by any forming, immovable by any movement, unimaginable by any imagining, unsensible by any sensing, unattractable by any attracting, untasteable by any tasting, inaudible by any hearing, unseeable by any seeing, inapprehensible by any apprehending, unaffirmable by any affirming, undeniable by any negating, undoubtable by any doubting, inopinable by any opining. And because [Wisdom] is not expressible by any expression, the intended object of these expressions cannot be thought, for Wisdom is unthinkable by any


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thought—Wisdom, through which and in which and from which are all things.\(^{28}\)

In *De Docta Ignorantia* Cusanus reduces the discombobulating possibilities of existence into a happily (in)coherent formula of ‘it is or it is not; it is and it is not; it neither is nor is it not.’\(^{29}\) This, he asserts, exhausts ‘all that we can say or think’ on the maximum truth which is in turn the Absolute Maximum. The Absolute Maximum is ‘above all understanding,’ and in that sense, quoting from Dionysius the Areopagite, Cusanus states ‘an understanding of God is not so much an approach towards something as towards nothing.’\(^{30}\) Just when the intellect declares the horizon free, and that we can now abort mission knowing ‘the enemy camp of mysticism’\(^{31}\) has retired into submission, is when learned ignorance leaps forward in mutinous glee, ‘sacred ignorance teaches me that what seems nothing to the intellect is the incomprehensible Maximum,’ and lurches forward towards the evanescent territory of the Absolute, in a radical abscondence from “the enemy camp of rationalism.” To approach the Absolute Maximum we must remove ‘all that has participated being.’\(^{32}\) By this he means that as we are beings we can only understand through our participation of being, but since the Absolute Maximum is beyond being we can never arrive at an understanding through this approach.

The ‘removal of participated being’ espoused by Cusanus has distinct characteristics of Dōgen’s iconic saying “body and mind casting off” and also of the ‘releasement toward things’ that Heidegger takes from Eckhartian mysticism.\(^{33}\) Learned ignorance is an apprehension of the void of unaccountable ‘stuff’. The void makes us ask ‘what is the use of the known if it has verified nothing but itself?’ Once obtained, knowledge is more or less rendered redundant, for knowledge is the constant striving to conquer the unknown. Either aware of the absence of an *a priori* order of things or creating that absence through the act of self perpetuation, the incessant becoming of knowledge is caught in a causal nexus of negation and


\(^{29}\) Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, 17.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 39


\(^{32}\) Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, 39.

creation. This is what Wittgenstein demonstrates in his *Tractatus*, 5.634 … Whatever we can describe at all could be other than it is. There is no a priori order of things,\(^{34}\) and which he then most consistently to the proposition, repudiates in his later work *Philosophical Investigations*. The ‘incomprehensible Maximum’ as that which the intellect does not perceive, so that which the intellect deems unimportant or non-existent, is of course the great unknown, and it is this very same inept intellect that Suzuki, San Juan, Anon and Dōgen to name a few, put aside (after use) in favour of an ineffable and incomprehensible experiencing. In the words of Nishida, ‘those who love and believe in God without knowing God are the ones who best know God.’\(^{35}\)

As Cusanus unveils his sea-borne epiphany of sacred ignorance, the Absolute Maximum, ‘which is above all understanding’\(^{36}\) moves further from reason and imagination (which though ‘limited to the material order’\(^{37}\) is an important and helpful aid to understanding) and comes ever closer to the indivisible immovable “simple centre,” at once the zenith and pole of the incomprehensible world. Cusanus maintains that because of the ultimate ‘impossibility of comprehending the world’\(^{38}\) it is only through the back door of learned ignorance that we may hope to garner something of meaning and find our flow in the perpetual movement towards the incomprehensible Absolute Maximum.

\(\gamma\). Movements of unknowing: casting o ff and stepping from the hundred foot pole

Most Chinese philosophy takes as a given some form of the doctrine of following two paths at once. This is a refreshing change from the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction that has asserted itself nearly as tenaciously as the Descartian *cogito* into the mechanisms of western thinking. I for one am happy to have two paths (at least) with open access available. Chang Chung-Yuan believes the possibility of simultaneous existence and nonexistence (two paths at once) may be understood if ‘we follow Seng Chao’s principle of letting the mind be free and

\(^{34}\) Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 69.
\(^{36}\) Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, 39.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 30.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 110.
empty.' \(^{39}\) Chang explains that because existence and non-existence are simultaneously nonexistence and existence, nonexistence is in effect not nonexistent in as much as existence is itself nonexistence. He refers to a well-known story of the white horse which comes from the *Chuang Tzu*, to illustrate the point, of the pointing finger. ‘To insist upon the existence of the horse and the finger and neglect the aspect of not-horse and not-finger, is to make the same mistake as to insist upon the not-horse and not-finger aspect and to neglect the existence of the horse and the finger.’ \(^{40}\) What this means is that because nonexistence is concealed within existence we can never understand the one without the other, we can never understand A without simultaneously understanding its not A-ness.

Great knowledge in the *Chuang Tzu* is associated with an empty mind, a mind in which ‘no thoughts occur.’ The openness of this mind allows pure thought to penetrate before the separation of object and subject. This is the same emptiness as that of the field of *śūnyatā* in which all things meet on their own homeground in their own suchness. Seng Chao writes in a recorded letter to Liu I-ming that the mind of the wise is ‘Silent, vast, vacuous, and limitless,’ a familiar incantation of attributes, not so far removed from those of the *apeiron*. The workings of this vast and vacuous mind are laid bare by Kuo Hsiang in his commentary on the *Chuang Tzu*:

> The man who works for knowledge cannot know knowledge. It is knowledge that knows knowledge itself. Knowledge knowing knowledge itself means no-knowledge (*wu chih*). When one understands not-knowledge, one knows that knowledge is produced from not-knowledge... as knowledge is produced from not-knowledge, not knowledge is most fundamental. Therefore, the real man gains knowledge through casting away knowledge. \(^{41}\)

Through the casting away of knowledge there is an incoming, an opening that is of a knowing not-knowledge. Chang concludes that the sense of real knowing, at

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 410.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 412. The Kuo Hsiang is considered one of the most important and authoritative commentaries on the *Chuang Tzu*, although Wing Tsit-Chan notes it is more a rendering of his own philosophical system than an objective commentary on the writings of Chuang Tzu. See Chan Wing-tsit, trans. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 183.
least as it is understood in Taoism and Zen, is a “knowing of non-knowing,” as Nishitani has called it, and as Chang states ‘real knowledge is not-knowledge.’

In a short story from the second chapter of the *Chuang Tzu*, Wang Yi and Yeh Ch’üeh discuss if there is the possibility of certain fixed truth or knowledge. In response to Yeh Ch’üeh’s questions about how to know ‘for certain that all things are the same,’ Wang Yi says:

> How can it be known that what I call knowing is not really not knowing and that what I call not knowing is not really knowing? Now I would ask you this. If a man sleeps in a damp place, he gets lumbago and dies. But how about an eel? And living up in a tree is precarious and trying to the nerves. But how about monkeys? Of the man, the eel, and the monkey, whose habitat is the right one, absolutely?[^42]

Wang Yi’s response bears a striking relationship to various fragments of Heraclitus, in particular, Fr. D. 9 Asses prefer garbage to gold, Fr. D.13 Swine delight in mire more than clean water; chickens bathe in dust, and Fr. D. 61 The sea is the purest and foulest water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly. There are no absolutes, nothing cannot be “this” and “that” at the same time. It is just a matter of what is referred to in the *Chuang Tzu* as ‘relativity of standards.’ Yet paradoxically, one thing we can be certain of, because of the certainty of flux, is that all things at some point are the same. But, because we are not eels or asses we can never know the “this” from the perspective of “that,” but we can know that we do not know and furthermore when we cast away even this not-knowing we can pass through the ‘Axis of Tao’ and converge ‘into the infinite One.’[^43]

A related story, this time in the form of a kōan from the Mumonkan, tells of the ultimate emptiness and blindness of the greatest measure of spiritual attainment if one then gets stuck unmoving upon this supposed summit of satori:

> Master Sekiso said, “From the top of a pole one hundred feet high, how do you step forward?” An ancient Master also said that one sitting at the top of a pole one hundred feet high, even if he has attained “it,” has not yet been truly

[^43]: Ibid., 636.
enlightened. He must step forward from the top of the pole one hundred feet
high and manifest his whole body in ten directions.\(^{44}\)

What-ever level of enlightenment one might have achieved, even if it is the
final ‘little point\(^{45}\) of satori, it is never the end. One cannot orbit happily in
perpetuity in ‘a static oneness\(^{46}\) flat-lining, dead. One must leap off (no tranquil
descent in Zen) from the zenith and mingle with the masses. This will not be a
difficult step after the ‘mental cataclysm’ and ‘fiery baptism’ that one has endured to
get there.\(^{47}\) Only the sneaky cheat will want to rest on their laurels of feigned glory
and avoid the humiliating nosedive to certain death, which is what will become of
one who has not authentically “attained ‘it.’”

Contemporary with Mumon (1183-1260) is Dōgen (1200-1253) who in full
flame with the fire sale attitude of the times (get rid of it!) experiences his own
personal satori through “body and mind casting off” (shinjin datsuraku). This phrase
which has come to be a defining message of the philosophy of Dōgen was received
by him under the guidance of master Ju-ching\(^{48}\) (1162-1228) in Sung China. There is
some contemporary polemic surrounding the authenticity of the translation of this
phrase. Some believe it was misconstrued by Dōgen, and possibly done so
intentionally as this would be consistent with his treatment of classic scripture which
often involved a radical re-interpretation to suit his purpose. Even if Ju-ching did
mean “cast off the dust from the mind” as is suggested, it does not diminish the great
force of this message as it is transliterated by Dōgen into his infamous “body mind
casting off.” Throwing off of body and mind is the way to the true self and the true
self is undivided pure emptiness. The great and true mind is “vacuous,” and the
movement towards unattainable perfection is a “trans-descendence\(^{49}\) into a
paradoxical affirmation through negation.

In Buddhism the way to authentic self-hood is through the abandonment of
self, somewhat akin to the kenosis of Christian mysticism, except in the self-


\(^{45}\) See Suzuki for very interesting comparative look at Eckhart’s development of ‘a little point’ and the
Zen moment of *satori*. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki *Mysticism; Christian and Buddhist* (London: George

\(^{46}\) Shibayama, *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*, 313.


\(^{48}\) Also known as Tiāntóng Rújìng and in Japanese as Tendō Nyōjō.

\(^{49}\) A term attributed to Yoshinori Takeuchi by Abe Masao but which occurs frequently in Nishitani’s
*Religion and Nothingness*. 120
forgetting of Buddhism there is no union with a transcendent other, but rather more an awakening to an immanent nothingness. Nishida distinguishes between movements towards the absolute as an outward objective transcendence in Christianity and an inward ‘immanent transcendence’ in Buddhism by which the absolute is encountered ‘by transcending the self inwardly.’

As Dōgen says ‘To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one’s self. To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self.’ This means that there is no other way to Buddha other than through the self and that there is no other Buddha to get to apart from true self, and true self is not a fixed point but a way. This is the Buddha Way. Like the warning Mumon gives in his poem for the above cited kōan, he who does not step forward ‘has been misled by the stuck pointer on the scale.’

In Islam, the principle of tawhīd as the declaration and belief in the unity of God is clarified to the believer through yet another instance of willing abandonment. In his interpretation of the Qurān’s symbolism, al-Ghazālī unveils the mystery behind the ‘doffing the two sandals.’ Only ‘by throwing off both this world and the next world’ can we turn towards the ‘One, the Real.’ The throwing off of the two worlds is symbolised through the “doffing the two sandals.” And because this world and the next as human constructs can be “donned and doffed at will” (unlike the mask of persona) they are likened to the donning and “doffing the two sandals.”

And for one more final fling why not throw off the Cartesian ego which stands ‘over against the world and all the things that are in it’ and which poses what Nishitani presents as a fundamentally flawed first truth. The problem with the cogito, ergo sum as Nishitani sees it is that the cogito fails to apply its method to itself, therefore it stands like a self-evident truth beyond doubt and in doing so creates a massive blind spot, a fatal field of deception. In fact this thinking ego needs not so much to be thrown off but broken through, and not by the doubting subject of Descartes but by the Great Doubt that puts the cogito ‘through the purgative fires in which the ego

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54 Ibid., 31.
55 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 13.
itself is transformed, along with all things, into a single Great Doubt. From the huge wealth of literature espousing the virtues of the Great Doubt of Zen, Nishitani selects a particular excerpt from a sermon of Takusui Chômô. Takusui leads the doubter deeper and deeper in an endless search for the ‘subject that hears,’ and in contradistinction to Descartes he does not stop there; ‘But however you go on doubting, you will find it impossible to locate the subject that hears. You must explore still further just there, where there is nothing to be found.’

56. Great doubt and the abyssal depths of awakening

The despair and angst of Zarathustra as he stares into the deep abyss of suffering that is life-sive-death and encounters the “abyssal thought” of eternal recurrence is what Nishitani proposes as ‘man’s collision with the essential barrier of his own Dasein. This is the so-called brink of despair, and yet also the ultimate form of man’s being in the world.’ The “Great Doubt” that exemplifies Buddhism’s ontological grounding is a trans-descendence into the dizzying heights of the mountainous abyss that stares back at Nietzsche as he gazes persistently into its depths. As Nishitani explains it, despair is the ultimate form of existing in the world, a form that belongs to a transcendent dimension as opposed to skepsis, which belongs to the dimension of reason. The courageous leap into the bottomless abyss of this sense of despair is handsomely rewarded with the glimmering promise of “yonder shore.”

Nietzsche’s infamous gazing abyss presaged by the warning of metamorphosing monsters at its brink, ‘Anyone who fights with monsters should take care that he does not in the process become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back into you,’ anticipates the form of knowing, a form of existence, that Nishitani calls ‘knowing by becoming.’ The reciprocal gazes of abyss and subject into each other signify a meeting on the own home-ground of the other. Or in other terms, a meeting on the ‘absolute near side.’ The absolute near

56 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 19.
57 A celebrated Rinzai monk of the eighteenth century.
58 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 20.
59 Ibid., 176.
side is the near side of the far side. That means a total overcoming of the distance between self and other. As the abyss gazes into us we are meeting it on its own home-ground. We are also confronting our own “Great Death.” This “Great Death” which is a personal participation in nihility that lies at the bottom of and is realised in a direct relationship with world-time, it is ‘an awakening to the “eternal” presence of the whole world-time.’

Nietzsche’s despair is exactly the abyss of doubt that the most profound and more often than not, paradoxical, kōan’s incite. One type of kōan, called nanto, is particularly complex, illogical and irrational for the purposes of shaking free the intellect from all its intuitional directives, devices, learning, strategies and preconditioned assumptions. It is as if to mercilessly take away the walking stick of a blind man and ‘push him down after turning him around’ so that ‘he will be thrown into the abyss of despair.’ Only from the depths of this Great Doubt can satori be realised and can the intellect penetrate into the real suchness of its own being through the darkness and intricacies of its self-made maze.

As Nishida sees it, the contradictions and sorrows of human life, one perhaps the seed of the other – and in a bi-directional capacity – come from a profound existential awareness of mortality. To confront one’s own death in an existential sense, that is, not just biologically, is what gives absolute meaning to individual existence. The individual is only considered unique in relation to its temporality ‘a deathless being is not temporally unique, and that which is not temporally unique is not an individual.’

The abysmal thought of eternal return smote Zarathustra dead for seven days. The terror of the recurring sameness of life is a terror based on ‘some kind of content.’ It is a terror of delusional proportions that separates itself from life and stands aghast, observing itself, ‘Delusion only arises if one becomes attached to objective determination, to taking what is conceived of by objective logic as concrete reality.’ This is the delusion of Nietzsche, the inability to overcome the “reified objective self,” a delusion that perhaps ultimately contributed to his own personal overwhelming and far flung despair.

61 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 231.
63 Nishida Kitarō, Last Writings, 67.
64 Joan Stambaugh, Impermanence is Buddha-nature; Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality, (Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 1990), 18.
65 Nishida Kitarō, Last Writings, 88.
Upon arousal from the abyssal depths that rendered him ‘like a dead man,’ Zarathustra relives the anguish of his fall, “shuddering” at the memory; ‘The greatest all too small! – that was my disgust at man! And eternal recurrence even for the smallest! that was my disgust at all existence!’ until his animals bade him be silent and speak no more of such things and listen instead to their gentle song, the singing of the healthy as they called it, and prepare himself ‘a new lyre!’ Ah! Delightful salve!

Zarathustra is not alone in his agonizing over the abyssal depths of a recurring noontide; another mendicant sage retreats from the vertiginous chasm of eternal return in deflated spirits, this time in the time of Japan (Muromachi period 1338-1573) and we should say this sage is ‘real’ as opposed to the fictitious character giving lively voice to the philosophy of Nietzsche but this is a matter of deep debate that shan’t be engaged in here, the point has nonetheless been made. Ikkyū writes ‘the thought of so many people, whether related to me or not, passing through reincarnations one after another, made me so melancholy, I left my native place and wandered off at random.’

ε. On Translation

The complexities of translation are by no means restricted to language. The hermeneutic motion is a responsive act of creation and in itself can be translated onto almost all creative outpouring. Upon the translation of Blanchot’s *L’Arrêt de mort* by Lydia Davis, Blanchot insisted that *Death Sentence*, the translation, was indeed now her book. This does not mean that her work was inaccurate or insensitive to the original, but that the exquisite rendering of the original into another form of itself was a new creation and rightly belonged to her authorship. It also suggests that no work can be translated without it becoming something else and therefore cannot in fact be translated at all. Not, that is, unless the conventions of translation include and acknowledge the ineluctable metamorphoses of the original in the hands of another,

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67 As the chosen instrument of Apollo and associated with Zarathustra’s emergence into the light, the abyssal depths of emotive anguish from which he recovers fulfill the ever present Dionysian counterpart.

which is a matter to do entirely with the experience of the translator, and not just as a translator and their experience of the text itself but also what is happening to them separately from the text whilst reading it, thinking about it, working on it. Although these seemingly external factors should perhaps not impress their influence on the translator-creator, they invariably do because the translator is *alive*. Indeed, if they are alive, and we presume that is the case, they must. Because they are alive (both text and translator) these unquantifiable moments, these inexplicable resonances between the text and its interlocutor are not merely incoherent glitches to be “refined out of existence” but are the very marrow, the heart, so to speak, of the matter.

The presence of the translator is a matter of metaphysics more than hermeneutics. It stretches back to the concept of the ‘I’ and to the position of that seeing ‘I’. If it is at the centre of the seeing of things as Descartes *cogito* would have it then it can only be expected that ‘in the final analysis one experiences only oneself’.

The presence of the translator cannot be ignored, as Kasulis asks, ‘how can I distinguish what I read in the text from what I may have read into it?’ Following what he discovers as a form of guidance provided by Dōgen himself on how to read the *Shōbōgenzō*, Kasulis embraces a form of translation that is ‘an act of intimacy’ with Dōgen by means of the text. The encounter made possible by this form of intimacy is with other than oneself in the text, that is, the meeting of the author on their own homeground. The process is not one of objectifying removal but of an inclusive empathy; ‘the strong poet peers in the mirror of his fallen precursor and beholds neither the precursor nor himself but a Gnostic double, the dark otherness or antithesis that both he and the precursor longed to be, yet feared to become.’

It is supposed by Benjamin that a translation exits because the original text wants to be read and the reader is not proficient enough in the original language to read it, but we cannot ignore that whether they like it or not, knowing or not knowing if it is a good (that is accurate) translation the reader is now reading another text, a text that will be transmitting its author in some way. The translator qua author qua conduit cannot be removed, though they may remain as neutral as possible and consciously not impede on the original they cannot cease to exist. This removal of

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69 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 173.
70 Kasulis, “The Incomparable Philosopher,” 95.
Second Episode

authorial presence (which in the likes of Beckett became the authorial presence removing) is identified by Steiner as a condition and predicate of the secondary text. In his well-known and influential essay *The Task of a Translator*, Benjamin entrusts the ‘afterlife’ of a work to the progenitive talents of the translator.\(^72\) He maintains that the continuing life of a work by virtue of the very definition of “living” must undergo transformation and renewal, thus the original *must* be changed to survive.

Harold Bloom extends this idea into what he presumes to be an absurdity yet which is the vital, in the true sense of the word, necessity of a ‘strong misreading.’ In his revelatory theory of poetry, *The Anxiety of Influence*, he inverts the lineage of influence from precursor to contemporary poet and poses ‘a revisionary ratio’ in which something even more ‘drastic’ than Borges’s suggestion that poets create their precursors, and that is ‘the triumph of having so stationed the precursor, in one’s own work, that particular passages in his work seem to be not presages of one’s own advent, but rather to be indebted to one’s own achievement, and even (necessarily) to be lessened by one’s greater splendor.’\(^73\) That certainly befuddles the order of things and challenges not only our notions of being and time, bringing them more into alignment with Dōgen’s being-time, but it completely displaces the idea of a fixed original source, removed and unmoving.

Bringing meaning to the ‘“emptiness of meaning” postulate’ by way of the indeterminate presence of reception in the reader, or viewer, or listener, or translator, Steiner rescues the “secondary text” and interpretative discourse from total bankruptcy. The exchange has become one of ontology rather than philology in the case of translation; ‘The congruence is never complete. It is never uniform with its object. If it was, the act of reception would be wholly equivalent to that of original enunciation. Our guest would have nothing to bring us.’\(^74\) And by bringing being into ‘a solitary language which instinctively speaks within…as soon as anyone who writes tries to grasp it, it changes beneath his hand.’\(^75\)

These briefest of references to the hermeneutic motion have a common feature of exchange. The exchange between text and translator, or re-interpreter as the case may be, with a triumphant poet raising his muse from the dead only to smite


\(^{73}\) Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 141.

\(^{74}\) George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1989), 175.

them down again with the brittle edge and glory of a modernised nib, is that of a co-
dynamic relation very much like the self-determining and interactive form of the
conscious self in relationship with the creative world. The dynamic structure of the
creative world is based on a reciprocity between the subjective and objective
dimensions that act together to co-create the world; ‘These acts are self-originating
and yet co-originating, too, as forms of dynamic, reciprocal expression.’76 The forms
of dynamic exchange in the approaches to translation hinted at above all participate
in some way in this mutually expressive and self-determining world view as
presented by Nishida. Nishida has created a structure of logic with his basho to
explain or at least house within a logical framework that which by definition is
illogical, the religious experience, and he has created a world view by which to
explain the activity of this reciprocal experience in an absolute present. The
dynamic structure of the world view he presents is founded on a contradictory identity of the
many and one and with a horizon of true individuality as the self-expression of the
absolute. With such a horizon there can be no telling what will appear, or disappear.

ζ. Transmission: breaking through the spell of language

In a brief excerpt dedicated to Bernard Shaw from Other Inquisitions, Borges
presents an argument for reading, or perhaps rather receiving, which goes quite
beyond what the written presents as to be read. In it he writes of ‘a secret and
continuous dialogue with nothingness or with divinity.’77 This dialogue is surely the
predecessor of the strange speech of which Blanchot writes four years later in his
Death of the Last Writer, the strangeness of which comes from that ‘while it may
seem to be saying something, it may in fact be saying nothing. One could even say
that depth itself is what speaks within it.’78 Not so distant cousins of the same void
that transmits to us its secret speech, to each individual as they hear or do not hear it.
Borges demarcates the transition from written to read as an individual passage of
multiple emissions: ‘A book is not an isolated entity: it is a narration, an axis of
innumerable narrations,’79 the differences between these “innumerable narrations”

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76 Nishida, Last Writings, 49.
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 166.
78 Blanchot, The Blanchot Reader, 152.
79 Borges, Other Inquisitions, 164.
come from how it is read, this in turn is entirely affected by when it is read, not to mention who is reading it. Just as with a conversation, which is how Borges conceives the book, much can be said not only through the silences and what is not said or left out but also by a silent and speechless voice which is transmitting its message at the same time as the words, like tendrils of an abandoned web, fluttering about and but tickle the surface of meaning with their light caress. In short, it would be foolhardy to think words could possibly single-handedly cast the spell of meaning. But too often this is exactly what happens, and we are caught in the web of words cast by the “spell of spelling” without deference to the subtle channels of air without which words would never reach us.

David Abram is not tricked by the ‘grip of that spell - the spell, we might say of spelling,’ he tells Derrick Jensen.80 We are in effect spellbound and the mitsugo (secret speech) transmission is fatally interrupted by ‘the mother of all our Western technologies,’ the alphabet. ‘Language’ says Abram, ‘doesn’t represent the world from outside, but rather that our language is itself a part of the world, that it bubbles forth in the midst of the world. Hence it can’t represent thing; it is a way of relating to things.’81

It is inconceivable to imagine that each and every individual relation within the world could be perfectly expressed; maybe it is only the inexpressible that can be expressed in a “perfectly precise sense.” A dialogue does not consist entirely of only the spoken and very rarely does one have the wit and calm to say all that can be said in a given discourse. The timbre of a voice may be tuned by the silence of a speaker as much as the said, and as Borges writes, ‘an interlocutor is not the sum total or the immediate value of what he says: it is possible for him not to speak and yet to reveal intelligence.’82 Like Blanchot’s unreadable speaking of non-speaking that sits silently at the centre of every book, ‘it is silent’ writes Blanchot, ‘since it is silence speaking.’ A decorative border of fine alphabetic weave giving form to the outer edges of the infinitely unsayable, ‘it is like the void itself, an insubstantial, insistent, indifferent murmur.’83

81 Ibid., 222.
82 Borges, Other Inquisitions, 163-166.
83 Blanchot, The Blanchot Reader, 151-156.
In the tradition of Zen, the transmission of knowledge from master to student is a matter of utmost delicacy and importance. The lineage of ‘right Dharma-eye’ transmission is a vital and active treasure that continues to emanate its radiance through to this day. The traditional lineage originates in India with Śākyamuni Buddha, who famously, with no more than a wink and a twist of a golden lotus flower, executed the first transmission of the Dharma-eye treasury to Mahākāśyapa and then from Mahākāśyapa a lineage of twenty-eight patriarchs can be traced up until Bodhidharma (440-528), the first Chinese patriarch. Dōgen states, ‘the right Dharma-eye treasury has been personally transmitted from rightful successor to rightful successor, and the true life of the Buddha-Dharma is nothing other than this authentic transmission.’ As he specifies, the transmission is made personally, that is, face-to-face (menju). The importance of face-to-face transmission of the Buddha-Dharma cannot be over-emphasised. It is rooted in the essentials of realisation through direct and authentic practice and individual experience over and above a scholarly or philosophical understanding through merely following and studying scripture; ‘the transmission of this real something cannot be actualised solely through explanations with words, or simply by passing on some manuscript.’ Hence Dōgen emphatically insists on the practice of zazen, though as is often exaggerated, not entirely to the exclusion of studying scripture, both play an integral part in the realisation of Buddha-nature or Dharma-nature in Dōgen’s pursuit of the Way.

In the Shōbōgenzō, Dōgen dedicates a fascicle to the time-honoured practice of menju (face-to-face transmission) enumerating each transmission in the nearly two thousand year history of Buddhist patriarchs. He starts the auspicious lineage of masters with the original act of Gautama Buddha on Vulture Peak, ‘Then Śākyamuni Buddha, in the order on Vulture Peak in the Western Country, India, among an assembly of millions, picked up an udumbara flower and winked. At that time the face of Venerable Mahākāśyapa broke into a smile. Śākyamuni Buddha said, ‘I possess the right Dharma-eye treasury and the fine mind of nirvāna. I transmit them to Mahākāśyapa.’ He then traces the intimacy of the ‘through face-transmission’ of the fifty-one patriarchs all the way up to himself.

85 Ibid., 209. This is the translator’s introductory note to the fascicle Menju.
86 Ibid.
The original Buddha’s face is thought to be contained in each ‘fleeting moment of cheeping and pecking,’ that is, each transmission, which channels the stream of faith and which manifests the eternal brightness of the Buddha’s countenance through the myriad years and \textit{kalpas}. An authentic transmission occurs through the cultivation of openness between master and disciple. It is an intimate exchange, a reciprocal action of reception and transmission, literally one face giving and one face receiving, ‘Thus, [master and disciple] have directly taken on the brightness of the Tathāgata’s face…even after thousands of years…or hundreds of \textit{kalpas}, or \textit{koṭis of kalpas}, this face-to-face transmission is the appearance of the face of, and the realization of the transmission from, Śākyamuni Buddha.’

In the Islamic world, a close contemporary to Dōgen writes his own magnum opus, \textit{al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya} (The Meccan Openings). In this monolithic encyclopaedic work, comprising of 560 chapters in 37 volumes, Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-‘Arabī (1165-1240) discusses the vast world of Islamic sciences in the special context of \textit{tawḥīd} and through his own early extraordinary “opening” to God. The title of this daunting work reflects in much the same way as the \textit{Shōbōgenzō} of Dōgen, the fundamental importance of an extra-rational ‘direct experience that is other than thinking.’ It is recorded by one of Ibn al-‘Arabī disciples and also confirmed by Ibn al-‘Arabī, though somewhat evasively, that all of his knowledge was received in a single fleeting moment, an “opening.” And out of that one moment all of his writing and knowledge tirelessly pours, and what he has written is ‘but a drop in the ocean’ in relation to the infinite well from which trickle his own words.

Chittick explains the term \textit{futūḥ} (opening) in the technical vocabulary of Ibn al-‘Arabī as a synonym for ‘unveiling, tasting, witnessing, divine effusion, divine self-disclosure, and insight.’ All of these meanings disclose an intimacy, an exchange, like that of the master-disciple transmission in Ch’an/Zen and also an

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \citet{dogen-1989}
\item The profession of God’s Unity that forms the core of Islam. See \citet{chittick-1989}. \citet{xvii-xxxv}
\item \citet{dogen-1989}
\item His disciple Shams al-Din Isma’il Ibn Sawdakin al-Nuri quotes him ‘I began my retreat at the first light and I had reached opening before sunrise…My opening was a single attraction in that moment.’ \citet{xiii}
\item \citet{xiv}
\item \citet{xii}
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undisclosed transmission, like that of mitsugo (secret talk) in Ch’an/Zen. Chittick describes the significance that each of these words has as ‘a mode of gaining direct knowledge of God and of the unseen worlds without the intermediary of study, teacher, or rational faculty. God “opens up” the heart to the infusion of knowledge.’ Conceding the very essential difference of a need for the teacher to activate the transmission of the Dharma in Ch’an/Zen, the sudden “infusion of knowledge” at this ‘opening of unveiling’ can be nothing other than a direct transmission from one master, the grand master God, to disciple. It is reception and openness to the Buddha-nature that, as Hsing-ch’ang suddenly experiences, ‘is not received from my teacher,/ Nor is it something I gained either.’ It was right there under his nose.

In “Mitsugo” (secret talk or intimate words), a fascicle from the Shōbōgenzō, the significance of the gesture of twirling the flower and winking in combination with the utterance of the ‘World-honoured One,’ (Śākyamuni Buddha) is addressed with particular deference to Dōgen’s stance on esoteric and exoteric meaning and on the place for both verbal and non-verbal teaching in the transmission of the Dharma. The idea of secret talk being something undisclosed to the uninitiated is apparently only what ‘stupid people’ would think. When it is used, “secret” is meant more as an action or meaning that is beyond recognition, it is ‘the truth of immediacy. It is the absence of any gap. It is total containment.’ Dōgen says we are surrounded by secrecy, which does not mean that things are hidden from us but that truth and reality are so immediate and constantly new in the absolute present that they are in effect rendered secret. Dōgen explains, ‘because the present is an ineffable moment it is secret to the self, it is secret to others, it is secret to Buddhist patriarchs, and it is secret to alien beings,’ so there is no need for the “stupid people” to feel discriminated. It is easy for the intrigue of the wink and the charm of the flower to overshadow the simplicity of the statement that Śākyamuni utters in this sacred moment, but as Dōgen makes plain, ‘If the World-honoured One hated speech but loved picking up flowers, he would have picked up a flower at the later time too.’ Secret talk also involves what I said. Both verbal and nonverbal action have their

93 Chittick, Ibn al-’Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imaginatio., xii.
94 Ibn al- Arabī quoted by Chittick, Ibn al-’Arabi’s Metaphysics of Imagination, xii.
95 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 98.
97 Ibid., 132-3.
place in the right Dharma transmission and likewise in the transmission of more or less everything.

In fact there is no authenticated record of this event ever having occurred, yet it is the very backing upon which the vertebrate lineage of face-to-face transmission is built. But, as Shibayama comments in his teishō of the kōan “Śākyamuni Holds Up a Flower,” another hypothetically spurious account of the mythic event, the fact that the story is not supported by history has very little bearing on the validity of its actual objective ‘the significance of the kōan and its historical basis belong to two different orders, and the former will not be affected by the latter.’

η. Silence, the untranslatable

‘Beyond the fusion that comes of great translation - - lies silence’

Silence is oft perceived, as with nothingness, beyond the jungle of somethings and din of declamation as an imperceptible source, quiet, reticent and abundantly generous. The quiescent wellspring from which pours all sounds and stuffs. One of Beckett’s early and recurring protagonists, Belacqua, in imagining the book he shall write, draws on this great wellspring of silence, declaring (in a fit of youthful vigor and passion so very remote from silence) ‘the experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silences, communicated by the intervals, not the terms of the statement.’ Simone Weil adds a lyric ode to Beckett’s phrasal intervals, ‘music starts from silence and goes back to it…creation and duration’ she writes, or then there is the silence like that of Cage and Blanchot, a pause amidst the noise, an interruption of the ceaseless inaudible murmur that penetrates like a gentle wind as a ‘gentle breath of endless recapitulation.’ All of the unsaid thoughts, all knowledge and enquiry, like the “chatter” of Zarathustra’s animals, fill the air with a dull piercing drone that muffles the silent reservoir of All and we remain estranged from the glorious unsaid. Steiner goes as far to say that ‘transcendental

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98 Shibayama, Zen Comments on the Mumonkan, 59.
intuitions have sources deeper than language, and must, if they are to retain their truth-claims, remain undeclared.102

6. The circimations of communication

In an investigation into Dōgen’s particular relationship with “words and letters” Hee-Jin Kim tackles the ambiguous and often contradictory statements and usages Dōgen makes of writing and language. He describes Dōgen’s proclivity for repetition as a methodology of ‘ripples’ that radiate out from the generative ascesis of zazen, to return again, revived and transformed.

All linguistic activities are the external soundings of the central hub of stillness of this non-thinking silence of absolute emptiness, the singular point of zazen. The image of concentric ripples orbiting around this absolute point of unquantifiable nothingness, illustrates the relationship of kōan to zazen as ‘a living force operative in the working of the realization-kōan, and what is more, that, in the truest sense, kōan becomes zazen, and zazen becomes kōan.’103

Kim differentiates Dōgen’s approach to kōan from the traditional teishō by an acute awareness of the vital realizational capacities of language. Therefore Dōgen’s use of kōan is not just to explain realisation but to activate it in a dynamic relationship with zazen. In this way the concentric ripples of linguistic activity reaching out from the circumferenceless centre of zazen can be ‘claimed to be the very workings of zazen,’104 as indeed Kim does. Furthermore the kōan can now be apprehended as a measure through which the intellect is liberated to pursue its own ontological possibilities rather than castigated and usurped or abnegated through the higher pursuits of dhyāna and transcendent wisdom.

In Dōgen’s boat we arrive on yonder shore of nirvāṇa with the very useful assistance of the oars provided, and flowing with the centripetal circimations of the rippling eddy we alight on the absolute near side, that is, the far side of the near side. Zen, like the Tao, is perhaps ultimately most eloquently expressed in silence, and this is certainly not a frivolous assumption. We are repeatedly given very solid grounds for such reasoning. The Tao Te Ching explicitly states the eternal name

102 Steiner, Real Presences, 111-2.
104 Ibid., 79.
cannot be spoken and that what-ever can be named is thus not the eternal name, ‘The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao/ The name that can be named is not the eternal name.’

But what Dōgen does with such matchless command, in the language and writings of the Shōbōgenzō is ‘realise the ineffable in and through speech and discussion.’ His creative use of language and his propensity for tailoring the traditional Zen literature to suit the occasion of his need ‘is in itself the realization and expression of spiritual freedom.’

Across a timeless void with nothing but hundreds of years dividing them, we encounter another spiralling entity. The metaphoric awakening to life, a little point, *satori*, is inscribed in the retina and irises of all the polyps, sea snails and larvae that the absent eyes of a Palaeolithic mollusc cannot see, but yet is quite assured has ‘foreseen,’ and indeed masterminded the great revolution occurring, that ‘all of a sudden, around us, eyes were opening.’

The process of becoming is literally analagised by Calvino through the millennium of metamorphosis that confront the mollusc, extending like unending infinite oceans before it, teeming with the spores of every future life, the reaching towards a longed-for enlightenment – the ultimate metamorphosis to hunker down ‘in our true element which extends without shores, without boundaries.’

A mingling of times, a remote past, an unimaginable future, crystallise in the radial symmetry of a secreting gastropod. Qfwfq (the posterior nomenclature of said gastropod, the very same as whom we encountered in the previous episode, not being a popular name) hurtling across rarefied galaxies, through violet cumuli, witness to the first sprouting of the moon contains all of time in his resilient being in a kaleidoscopic encounter with *uji*.

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105 Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 139. For other translations see, ‘The way can be spoken of,/But it will not be the constant way; The name can be named,/ But it will not be the constant name’ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman’s Library, 1994), 49. Also ‘The Tao that can be told of/I Is not the Absolute Tao;/The Names that can be given/ Are not Absolute Names.’ Lin Yutang, ed. *The Wisdom of China and India* (New York: Random House Inc., 1955), 583.

106 Kim, “‘The Reason of Words and Letters,’” 84.

107 Ibid., 78.


109 Ibid., 151.
1. Symbolic structuring and the circle (with Nicholas Cusanus)

In a summary outline of Nishida’s basho, Robert Wargo identifies the tri-partite structure of the three worlds defined in the enfolding basho system. These three worlds are the natural world, that of consciousness and the intelligible world. Wargo also identifies a tri-partite structure within each basho. Each basho has logical, ontological and epistemological significance. Ultimately the progressive deepening of self-consciousness culminates in the basho of absolute nothingness where there is no differentiation between the logical, ontological or epistemological levels. At this point knowing of non-knowing is possible precisely because ‘the distinction between epistemology and ontology is erased.’

It may also be possible to discern a hint of Cusanus in Nishida’s basho “looping.” Looping is the term Wargo uses to describe the consequence of interpenetrating loci that make up the system of independent yet connected basho. In De Ludo Globi (The Game of Spheres) Cusanus applies a similar order of concentric circles, each enfolded in the next, to explicate the ‘ten diverse classes of distinction,’ with God as the Absolute Maximum at the centre from which the other nine orders emanate. This is a diagrammatic inversion of Nishida’s looping which has the ultimate basho of absolute nothingness as the outermost enveloping loop rather than the innermost and central core. There is however, a limitless circumference to this outer field in as much the same way as Cusanus uses the image of a sphere without circumference whose centre is encountered everywhere as a representation of divine omnipresence. This same image is drawn on by both Nishida and Nishitani with reference to Cusanus on numerous occasions, and is probably one of the statements for which Cusanus is most renowned. Ironically, as Hopkins points out, the image actually derives from the work of Pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus and Cusanus appears to have taken it from Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) who is recorded to have used the formula in no less than six places.

12 Hopkins, A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa, 13. Hopkins is quoting from Wackerzapp, Der Einfluss Meister Eckharts, see nt 34, 161. On this point in her translation of De Ludo Globi, Pauline Moffitt Watts somewhat differs in opinion with Hopkins, maintaining that Cusa ‘explicitly recalls Hermes’ saying in support of his own discussion.’ See, Cusanus, De Ludo
De Ludo Globi is a two part dialogue between the Cardinal Nicholas himself as the major interlocutor, and John (Ioannes/Johannes), “the illustrious Count palatine and Duke of Bavaria” in part I and then joined by the Duke’s cousin Albert in part II. Cusanus invents a “game of spheres” by which to explain the power of powers, believing as he does that the nature of reality can only really be represented metaphorically. It is unknown precisely if the game he describes has ever been played or existed. It is comparative to the English bowls, the French pétanque and the Italian bocce, but it is alone in its symbolic exemplification of the absolute unity of God. At the opening of part I the Duke implores the Cardinal to discourse on the new game they have just retired from playing, ‘this delightful exercise with the ball,’ as he sees within it the profit of deep speculation which he believes ‘represents a significant philosophy for us.’\textsuperscript{113}

The playing field of the game has a central point around which nine concentric circles are transcribed. At its most basic the game revolves around this central point and the progressive movement towards it. It is metaphorical of the souls journey towards the absolute, the centre seat of life, towards ‘the ruler whose kingdom is the kingdom of life,’ none other than ‘Jesus Christ, our king and the giver of life.’\textsuperscript{114}

Significantly the globus of the ludus globi is an imperfect spheroid with a certain scooped out convexity. What is perfect is never seen, the visible material form of human creation is thus necessarily reflected in the imperfection of the playing apparatus, ‘This is what I mean’ says the Cardinal, ‘nothing is visible except in matter. Moreover, true roundness cannot exist in matter but only the image of true roundness.’\textsuperscript{115}

The roots of this line of reasoning can be found in the discussions of the structure of the universe that occur in De Docta Ignorantia. In particular, the exposition of unity he espouses in Book I by means of mathematical symbolism

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\textit{Globi/ The Game of Spheres}, 27. Though Hermes is not named with specific reference to the saying in question ‘the dictum of the wise man who said that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere,’ (Ibid., 101) Cusanus does explicitly name Hermes Trismegistus in Book I of De Ludo Globi, ‘Therefore it is evident that Hermes Trismegistus spoke correctly when he said that the world is not visible from itself because it is round and that nothing is seen of it or in it except the forms of things contained in it,’ (Ibid., 61) which would make it rather strange that he would borrow from Meister Eckhart rather than Hermes himself the dictum of God as a sphere whose centre is everywhere, despite Hopkins authoritative persuasions to the contrary.
\textsuperscript{113} Cusanus, De Ludo Globi, 55.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 59.
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through the absolute infinite line coinciding with the infinite circle, clearly precedes the later arguments occurring in *De Ludo Globi* upon the true roundness (perfection) of the world and its invisibility and indivisibility. In his demonstration of the straightness of the diameter of an infinite circle ‘the circumference of the absolutely greatest possible circle will be the smallest possible curve; it will be, therefore, absolutely straight’ and the general proposition that an infinite line ‘would be at once a straight line, a triangle, a circle, a sphere; similarly, if there were an infinite sphere, it would at once be a circle, a triangle and a line; and it would be likewise with the infinite triangle and infinite circle’ Cusanus paves the way for an understanding of the relationship he endeavours to articulate between the “Maximum” - which is at once the “Minimum” - with all things. This relationship, formulated by adopting the symbolism of mathematics in *De Docta Ignorantia*, is likewise explicated through the metaphoric structuring of the *ludus globi* in *De Ludo Globi*.

In *De Ludo Globi* the infinite potentiality of the individual element (the human) is symbolically activated by the imperfections of the *globus* as it randomly determines the direction of the player when the spheroid is projected onto the field (of life) and vacillates between paths. The simple and most serene centre by which we come to through the many diverse and curved paths of accident, fateful propulsion and design, is the imperceptible point of perfection that equates with the eternal now of Meister Eckhart, the decisive Moment of Kierkegaard, ‘the little point’ or satori of Mahayana Buddhism and the augenblick of Nietzsche. The symbolic structuring of the *ludus globi* directs the player to this ‘most simple centre’ in a gradual unfolding that reveals it as ‘the beginning, middle, and end of all circles’ and as the ‘beginning of equality’ by nature of its indivisibility. This point of oneness enfolds the magnitude of all things within it and is therefore found within all things but without all things then becoming one, thus accounting for plurality or the “multitude”; ‘Hence it [one] appears in every multitude because multitude does not exist except as the unfolding of unity. So you see the same thing in an analogous way concerning the point which is the enfolding of magnitude.’

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118 Ibid.
κ. The infinite and finite in a *coincidentia oppositorum*

The relation between the universal and particular, or more specifically, the potentiality of the finite and the actualisation of all potentialities in the infinite, is a recurring preoccupation central to the work of Cusanus. In the well-known dictum from *De Docta Ignorantia* Cusanus asserts ‘that between the infinite and the finite there is no possible proportion.’ At times throughout the development of his ideas it seems as if Cusanus is fated to contradict himself regarding this adamant statement.

Lee Clyde Miller remarks that the human mind which Cusanus presents in *Idiota de Mente* is dependent on its divine exemplar and therefore to some degree infinite in its own way. Miller cites a comment made by the spoon-maker/layman early on in the dialogue that could problematically contradict the edict of proportionality for which Cusanus is so famed; ‘the proportion which exists between God’s works and God is the same as that between the works of our mind and the mind itself.’ Yet if we keep in mind, as Hopkins suggests, the idea of ‘a certain disproportionate likeness’ that might deign to filter through to human experience, then by dint of the filter (the finite human) which albeit does create a certain distortion but whilst allowing this “certain disproportionate likeness” of the unimaginable God, the infinite, to penetrate, the lack of true proportionality between the finite and infinite is there-by demonstrated in the process.

The phrase in question is taken from one of the later dialogues, *Trialogus de Possess* (On actualised-possibility) and is part of an attempt to explain the relation of the maximum to the minimum as one and the same whilst upholding the assertion of the lack of proportion between the finite and infinite. The dialogue is between the Cardinal, the Abbot John, and Bernard, an esteemed colleague. Reminiscent of *De Docta Ignorantia* the Cardinal states, ‘Assuredly there is no error in one’s saying that God is absolutely maximal and absolutely minimal greatness, alike.’ From this and further ‘gratifying’ teachings from the Cardinal, the Abbot John makes the

119 Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, 73.
122 Ibid., 73.
observation referred to above of the absolute beauty of God and the creatable beauty that can but be “a certain disproportionate likeness to that Beauty.”

With regard to this recurrent theme Pauline Moffitt Watts draws on the first series of his dialogues (written in 1450) to show the critical inter-relationship in operation between the two dimensions of creative life – divine and human - that Cusanus labours to bring to light throughout his work. In the first of the *Idiota* dialogues *De Sapiente* (About wisdom) it is in the very bustle and carryings-on of the street that ‘wisdom proclaims [itself] openly.’ \(^{123}\) The oneness of Wisdom \(^{124}\) shows its face, not in the singular utterance of words but in the manifold doings of the people, ‘the very multiplicity of activities of the marketplace is an expression of the single root of infinite wisdom.’ \(^{125}\) In the second dialogue, *Idiota de Mente* (The Layman: About Mind), the craftsman of the market place, free from the prison of book learning, demonstrates through the humble art of spoon making how all comes from one and how the part cannot be conceived without knowing the whole:

> The part is not known unless the whole is known, for the whole measures the part. When I carve the spoon by parts from the wood, I refer to the whole in fitting each part so that I may carve a well-proportioned spoon. In this way the whole spoon which I have before my mind is the model to which I refer while fashioning each part. \(^{126}\)

The general schema of ideas consistent with the overall trajectory and development of his oeuvre, are already evident in the earlier work *De Coniecturis* (1442-3). As mentioned in the previous episode, this work elaborates upon the unattainable oneness of truth that can only be surmised through otherness and as every individual differentiates in otherness the same conjecture is never made. However, in a species of *coincidentia oppositorum* the ‘presiding oneness’ of truth dwells persistently in the multitude, albeit in ‘various degrees of otherness-of-mode.’ \(^{127}\) In all of the works touched upon, whilst never abandoning the principle of

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\(^{123}\) Cusanus, *Idiota de Sapientia*, 498.

\(^{124}\) As Hopkins notes Cusanus uses Wisdom and wisdom distinctly. We could say that “Wisdom” is representative of the infinite and unknowable God, and “wisdom” is the gathering of unknowing. See Cusanus, *Idiota de Sapientia*, nt. 13, 524.

\(^{125}\) Cusanus, *De Ludo Globi*, 21.

\(^{126}\) Cusanus, *Idiota de Mente*, 75.

there being no proportionality between the infinite and finite, a very considerate relation between the two as inter-dependent magnitudes is cultivated. The infinite might fall into the distant realms of ineffability but with recourse to the sensory and imaginary the finite marks its trace of flight and brings to us the impression of its fall.

The *via negativa* by which this impression is recorded is most effectively understood in conjunction with the doctrine of *coincidentia oppositorum* advanced by Cusanus. Via the constant way of symbolic language, from mathematical formula in *De docta ignorantia*, a spinning top in *De Possest*, the craftsmanship of object making in the *Idiota* dialogues and the bowling game of spheres in *De Ludo Globi* Cusanus uncovers the trail to God. According to Hopkins this trail is divided into three alternative routes that all converge into the same ultimate destination. These three formulae in Hopkins’ account are: ‘(1) in God all opposites coincide; (2) God is above (prior to) all opposition; (3) God is beyond the coincidence of opposites.’

Implicit in these formulae is the agreement of maximal and minimal resident in the Absolute Maximum and the fact of the ‘unnameable and unknowable nature of God’ which inevitably leads Cusanus to the *via negativa* as a most suitable and efficacious approach, and perhaps the only approach, to such an unspeakable and unknowable domain.

Transcendence of the principle of non-contradiction is realised through the *coincidentia oppositorum* in which God is understood to be at once the coincidence of all things and yet beyond the distinction of coincidences. This is a standpoint that along with Cusanus’ ‘predilection for paradoxical expression’ is curiously reminiscent of Zen. It is not surprising then that in the relatively recent exchange and dialogue between western and eastern philosophies, Christian mysticism and especially the work of Meister Eckhart has been looked to in a comparative light with the philosophy of Zen. Importantly however, it must be noted that most commentators contend that Zen is not to be considered merely as a form of mysticism, this being a grave and injurious misunderstanding.

The varying degrees of otherness which for Cusanus are representative of the universal, and the ever changing conjecture of truth according to these varying

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129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., 27.
degrees, smacks of a Heraclitean cosmology in which the so-called doctrine of the
unity or identity of opposites in active conjunction with his theory of flux explain the
basic structure of the world. Akin to this Heraclitean universe formulated through the
seemingly contradictory unity of stability and flux, and which is most famously
illustrated through the analogy of a moving river, Cusanus too demonstrates his
proposition of the endless variations and gradations of agreements and differences in
humankind through the constant flow of the Rhein river.

For example, the Rhein river is seen to flow constantly for awhile; but it
never remains in one and the same state, since it is now more turbulent, now
more clear, now rising, now receding. So too, it is the case that although it is
ture to say that the Rhein was larger and smaller and that it passed gradually
from largeness to smallness, nevertheless it is evident that the Rhein was
never before exactly as it now is.\textsuperscript{131}

In both Cusanus and Heraclitus then there is a causal relation between
oppositional unity and variegated change. Opposites ultimately coincide through
processional flux emanating from a common and stable oneness. The continuous
cycles of transformational exchange are most simply expressed in Heraclitus Fr. D.
126 Cold warms up, warm cools off, moist parches, dry dampens.\textsuperscript{132} Perhaps of
incidental accord, the imagery and inference of Fr. D. 84a It rests by changing.\textsuperscript{133}
turns the mind to Cusanus’s spinning top of \textit{De Possess}, which has the appearance of
resting the faster it spins. Although a disputed fragment, for recorded through the
unverifiable paraphrasing of Plotinus it is thus even more open to conjecture and the
distortions of de-contextualisation than usual, it does serve a serendipitous purpose
here. The change Heraclitus refers to could just as easily be construed as action, as
sameness, thus taking the infinite motion of Cusanus’s spinning top the change
comes as one of stillness or rest.

\textsuperscript{131} Cusanus, \textit{De Coniecturis}, 240.
\textsuperscript{132} Kahn, \textit{The Art and Thought of Heraclitus}, 53.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
λ. Reality, metaphor, symbolism and similitude

Symbols and metaphors are conduits for ineffable realities, worlds bordered by a twilight promise that require more than the sharp lines of a probing beam to capture the escaping content. Ideas and sentiments that do not tidily end when the full stop is grammatically required may be expressed through images and associations where-in the varying interpretations of which may be infinite and therefore more accurate. That there is need and use of such methods heralds the undisclosed other that beckons behind every creative endeavour. By creative I mean to include the most basic acts of survival; washing, baking and breathing. Each act or object is but a shadow of an imperceivable reality. In Ṣūfī mysticism this is the unseen world of Dominion and what we experience in our shadowy reality is the living similitude of this mysterious and divine but real world of Dominion. Our maladroit fandangos across the irregulated surfaces of illusion are the teething totters of an unimaginably fluid flight. This fleet footed flight is the auxiliary route of the unseen, directed by a most imaginative design of symbols and signs.

Dōgen writes in the fascicle Uji from the Shōbōgenzō:

Mountains are time, and seas are time. If they were not time, there would be no mountains and seas. So you must not say there is no time in the immediate now of mountains and seas. If time is destroyed, mountains and seas are destroyed. If time is indestructible, mountains and seas are indestructible.134

The immensity, majesty and imperceivable finitude of mountains and seas give them an air of hierophanous potency which Dōgen summons to transmit the same qualities within his concept of being-time (uji). Mountains and sea are more than symbolic referents, containers or carriers, they are simultaneously their meaning. As active similitudes, they are more than ‘sheer metaphor, without reality.’135

In The Niche of Lights, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī elucidates the basic principles of Islamic cosmology through an explicit reading of the Qurān’s Light Verse. Addressing his reader in the brief introduction he beseeches ‘anoint your insight with the light of Reality’ and offers himself as an interpretative guide ‘I unfold for you the

134 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 56.
135 Al-Ghazālī, The Niche of Lights, 3.
mysteries of the divine lights.' The text following, once clearly establishing God as the real light of which all else is ‘sheer metaphor,’ explicates the significance of the niche, glass, lamp, tree and olive that occur in the Light Verse. He attributes to each a perceptual faculty of the human soul (senses, imagination, rationality, reflection, and the prophetic) of which the niche, glass, lamp, tree and olive respectively are the outward similitude. Though it may be through symbols that divine knowledge is imparted, these symbols are not then to be ‘nullified’ as simply representative of something else. It is only by recognising the parallel between the two worlds, of inner mysteries and outward meanings that the perfect way is attained and ‘through this it comes to be known that the outward similitude is true and behind it is a mystery.’ In this same sense, apart from making explicit the connection of being and time, can Dōgen’s statement that “mountains are time, and seas are time” also be understood.

Grasping the kaleidoscopic “light of Reality” as it flickers and sparks is no dim feat. In fact it cannot really be grasped at all, such a slippery amorphous thing is it. Similitudes and symbolisms help direct us to the gateway of this imperceptible splendour. However, it is a funambulist feat by which our sight is balanced betwixt the sign, the signalled and blindness. The symbol can be so convincing it is taken as reality and either misconstrued and rejected or deified, ‘but the truth is,’ Suzuki tells us, ‘that Symbols are after all symbols and when this inner signification is grasped they can be utilised in any way one may choose.’ Here Suzuki refers to the interpenetration of ideas apparent within Shin, Zen and Christian mysticism, and how, for example, a distinctly Christian symbolism can be comfortably and effectively appropriated to convey something otherwise considered typically Buddhist.

For Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) the only possible way to present reality is through symbolism. Symbolism functions as an ‘opening’ that acts as a container and transmitter of the rationally challenging form of reality as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, which in Eliade’s understanding, and to which I concur, is ‘the mode of being of Ultimate Reality.’ It is through the symbolic that comprehension of the

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137 Ibid., 34.
universal is realized. The understanding comes from an involvement or engagement with the symbol that comes about as a lived experience ‘of intuitions, of immediate seizures of reality.’\(^{140}\) A similar idea is expressed in the “pure experience” of James, and then Nishida in his consequent developments of James’s original notion. This direct or pure experience as they describe it occurs outside of the logical mechanisms that work to translate reality into a comprehensible form. It could readily be described as an “immediate seizure of reality” occurring before the binary codes of consciousness assert themselves, and object and subject suffer the disorienting estrangement of eternal divorce. According to Eliade the symbol holds its value in a ‘plurality of contexts’ and it is for this reason that it has access to the universal.

Alternatively, meaning can also be so coy and ambiguous that the presentation of it (meaning and “reality”) is presumed symbolic.

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The advertence of such presumption and projection directs the final words of Beckett’s novel Watt; ‘no symbols where none intended.’\(^{141}\) Of course with Beckett there is always the possibility (probability even) of irony, and this denunciatory maxim, posing as a conclusive disclaimer, cannot necessarily be taken literally, certainly not in light of what precedes it and certainly not with the retrospective foresight of what was to follow.

Or then again, travelling on a continuous by-pass, hurtling with blinding intention towards a fixed destination, we are likely to miss the exit altogether, that gateway to the true “light of Reality.” On this superhighway of symbols, signals and meanings it can all become a little overwhelming. The prudent measure is to just ignore all the signs and carry on. But so much gets missed, so little is experienced, as demonstrated in the outstanding example of the character Watt. And yet, too much significance given to the symbol, too much weight on the word, unbalances the teetering act, the featherweight hovering supported only by the slightest thread of matter: a fraying line suspended between beginning and end, birth and death, upon which we wobble our way along.

\(^{140}\) Eliade, *Symbolism, the sacred, and the arts*, 13-14.

This sobering high-wire act of meaning gleaning, takes literal and symbolic form in the spavined gait of so many of Beckett’s ‘people.’ Their halting and reluctant yet ineluctable motility echoes Beckett’s own disgruntled, exasperated and inexorable compulsions to write, covertly confessed in *Three Dialogues* as ‘The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.’ Expressing, in other words, the perpetual purgatory of Beckett’s mortal condition as an artist. The conclusive ‘no symbols where none intended’ is Beckett’s strategic bow out in what makes up the addendum of *Watt*, like an unrehearsed encore, its fragments, no less ‘precious’ than the gems of the greater setting of the novel, are neglected only through ‘fatigue and disgust.’

In an essay on Symbolism, the literary movement, of which Beckett is no part (and nor is he part of the same movement within theatre), Mary Lydon exposes the double entendre of the unavoidably symbolic inference of Beckett’s repudiation: ‘one might say that Beckett is arguing here against interpretation, while slyly acknowledging that it is hopeless to do so.’ The lurching and limping of the majority of Beckett’s (mostly) recalcitrant protagonists is a perfect embodiment of the faltering, hesitant and determined movements of the passage of existence through time and space - our most stalwart companions throughout life.

Perhaps Beckett’s tortured company of dancers inspired Pina Bausch in her production of *Frühlingsopfer* (Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*), or at very least, a study of his ungainly footpath waltzes would be of undoubted profit for budding choreographers.

Although nearly any work, randomly selected, would furnish us with many prospective leads for the troupe we might as well continue plundering the wealth of symbolic material in *Watt* (a fitting irony I think). In fact, within one short paragraph of opening, the novel in question introduces us to the gyrations of the first character,

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142 Apparently, according to Ruby Cohn this is how Beckett referred to his characters. ‘Samuel Beckett’s dramatic characters-he calls them “my people”-never play artifacts, and one can never dogmatize: “The truth is so” about his resonant plays.’ See Ruby Cohn, ‘Beckett’s Theater Resonance’ in *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, eds. Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski and Pierre A.G. Astier (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 4.
143 Beckett, *Disjecta*, 139.
Mr Hackett, ‘His walk was a very agitated walk,’ we are told, which is peculiarly understated for the early prose, but then again, we are graced with more visual disturbances further on. In the company of Mr Hackett – though from a marked distance - we find Watt, whose pedestrian tango deserved a whole hearted analysis, which I also think deserves an airing here:

Watt’s way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down. So, standing first on one leg, and then on the other, he moved forward, a headlong tardigrade, in a straight line. The knees, on these occasions, did not bend. They could have, but they did not. No knees could better bend than Watt’s, when they chose, there was nothing the matter with Watt’s knees, as may appear. But when out walking they did not bend, for some obscure reason. Notwithstanding this, the feet fell, heel and sole together, flat upon the ground, and left it, for the air’s unchartered ways, with manifest repugnancy. The arms were content to dangle, in perfect eqipendency.

This is modern dance at its best. It is also a splendid co-ordination of ostensibly counter-intuitive movements that somehow miraculously produce the desired advance. The result is all the more profound for its unexpectedness. In a real and active sense of a similitude, that is, in the actuality of a thing or, in the case of Watt’s example, a movement (physical representative of the existential) the prodigious powers of the symbolic and metaphoric are communicated. There is something of the tragic and the comic about the ‘high stamping mass’ of Watt, and viewed at ‘a judicious remove’ the paradox of the parody unveils its finer features. The fact that the fact of a body, the housing of our material corpus, somewhat,

146 Beckett, Watt, 5.
147 Ibid., 28-9.
148 Ibid., 30, by Lady McCann and co.
alotwhat, impedes movement and seriously curtails the flight of free passage, and yet without it, here, on this material plane, movement cannot be traced at all. Indeed without it, the encumbrment of a body, there would be no it, no here, no being here, not in a body that is, moving along. There is a strange co-dependency of origination transcribed in the movements of a body moving through its life as life moves through the body. Much as, once again “mountains are time, and seas are time.”

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Lodged in the embodied forms of metaphor the transcendent makes an appearance without having to land. Because the language of metaphor is imagistic and indirect a distance is always maintained that grants a freedom of meaning. The ‘access to a transcendent idea’\(^\text{149}\) that metaphoric language gives us is conditioned in some way by this distance. The liberty of discretion permitted by what Steiner names a ‘cortesia’ is what ‘allows us to inhabit the tentative.’\(^\text{150}\) This cortesia provides the vital distance between individual truths that prohibits telling someone what to think. Jaspers cites Socrates, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard as amongst those who ‘dare not presume to tell their companions what to believe.’\(^\text{151}\) And this is why, according to Ward in her appraisal of the fleeting moment of augenblick, ‘having no absolute truths to offer, they say nothing in a straightforward manner.’\(^\text{152}\) We could add Heraclitus as an inspiring forebear of this little clan, though he seemed to wish people would think how he tried to tell them to, he never told them using straightforward statements and ‘preferred to explain, if at all, in imagistic terms.’\(^\text{153}\)

The curving and indirect route, ‘the arc of metaphor, without which there can be neither shaped thought nor performative intelligibility, spans an undeclared foundation’\(^\text{154}\) and in the absence of declaration everything becomes possible. The “arc of metaphor” is the rainbow bridge of Iris, ‘offspring of Thaumas’ the ‘shining wonder’ that becomes the symbol of philosophy in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. Iris is the


\(^{150}\) Steiner, *Real Presences*, 176.

\(^{151}\) Ward, *Augenblick*, 75.

\(^{152}\) Ibid.


\(^{154}\) Steiner, *Real Presences*, 176.
Homeric messenger, the ‘link between gods and men,’ the aery spectrum that Ward draws from in her related images of ‘bridges, tightropes and rainbows’ as ‘arcing metaphors which serve the purpose of spanning a divide, and maintaining the tension between one realm and another.’ These arching metaphors are supports for the ‘gateway moment’ of augenblick as it occurs specifically in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. The very phrase the “arc of metaphor” transcribes a floating world of symbolic inference. The Ark as the original metaphor then becomes a ship of fools, sent out to warn the believing blind who could not believe their eyes and did not want to believe the mad. On it goes in a manner reminiscent of Borges’s question of whether universal history is nothing more than ‘the history of the diverse intonation of a few metaphors.'

At the same time as being an indirect means to “a transcendent idea” metaphoric language is also a means in some respect to literally express ‘in a concrete mode a certain dimension of the Divine Reality.’ In the hermeneutic work of Ibn al-‘Arabī as he is “opened” to the teachings of the Qurān, each individual word is given full attention as an appointed word, specifically chosen by God through the messenger of Muḥammad. The word itself is representative and holder of an entire world of meaning that cannot be transliterated by another. It becomes the living metaphor of what it means.

Nishitani explains the ‘primal fact’ of metaphor as it arises on its own homeground ‘stripped of the discerning intellect that infiltrates our ordinary talk of sense perception.’ From the groundless centre of a non-objectifiable “middle” mode of being, the true suchness of a thing is in its primal fact at one with emptiness. Therefore it is what it is without being caught in what it is. It is in a sense a metaphor of itself but without there being any other thing which is more truly it, ‘the metaphor as such is the primal reality or fact.’ The bridge between the appearance and the reality is held in the likeness between the thing and its appearance, without there being anything more real behind the appearance. The likeness or ‘true suchness’ is as that which Nishitani says is ‘contained in the assertion “the bird flies and it is like a

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155 Plato, Theaetetus, 37.
156 Ward, Augenblick, 37.
157 Borges, Other Inquisitions, 9.
158 Chittick, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination, xvi.
159 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 157.
Second Episode

bird.”” With this phrase Nishitani invokes the sublime “primal reality” of the final stanza of a Dōgen poem, “The point of Zazen,” to which he is undoubtedly referring:

Clear water all the way to the bottom; a fish swims like a fish.
Vast sky transparent throughout; a bird flies like a bird.\(^{160}\)

\(\mu. \text{ On language}\)

Everything which is involved in the expressiveness of language remains itself inexpressible and therefore outside language, but according to Bertrand Russell this incommunicable hiatus can be expressed in a ‘perfectly precise sense,’ and Wittgenstein graciously demonstrates it by saying a ‘good deal about what cannot be said.’\(^{161}\) Wittgenstein also makes patently clear the impossibility of saying anything about the world as a whole. It can only be spoken of in bounded proportions, the finite, or, in other words the particular. In Nishida’s reckoning all relativity is the self-determination of the absolute or universal, so through the particular the whole world \emph{is} spoken. But how are we to know the whole as a particular? How can the individual utterance ever be representative of this whole when it cannot be said that which cannot be thought? We bumble unwittingly through the complex conventions of language ‘just as people speak without knowing how the individual sounds are produced.’\(^{162}\)

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Interlude: We are afforded a perfect exhibition of this common failing in an absurdly comic scene of Molière’s social satire \emph{Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme} (The would-be gentle man). Monsieur Jourdain, a buffoon of bombastic proportions, representative of the vulgar and vainglorious ambitions of the rising middle-class of seventeenth-century France, requests of his philosophy master a lesson in orthography - after being successively flummoxed by the altogether overwhelming dimensions of Latin, logic, morality and physics. The philosophy master thus

\(^{160}\) Dōgen, \emph{Moon in a Dewdrop}, 219.
\(^{161}\) Bertrand Russell in his introduction to Wittgenstein, \emph{Tractatus}, xxiii.
\(^{162}\) Wittgenstein, \emph{Tractatus}, 22, proposition 4.002.
proceeds to direct M. Jourdain through some very rudimentary exercises of the proper enunciation of his vowels, to which M. Jourdain displays his usual excesses of bedazzled ignorance and bemusement. The same airs of deception are captured in this poem by Zen master Mumon:

The wind moves, the flag moves, the mind moves:  
All of them missed it.  
Though he knows how to open his mouth,  
He does not see he was caught by words.  

The transitory and diverse nature of language as the tongue of (wo)man, ‘the “lingo”’ as Heidegger puts it, is a “showing” of the same diversity within the individuality of (wo)man. If each individual “showing,” each articulation of sound is the soul transposed through the enunciatory skills of the muscular hydrostat then even Aristotle in his categorical treatment of language concedes (unwittingly) that it is possible that there can be no correct speaking, no precise immutable pronunciation, only a sounding of the soul, ‘Now, what (takes place) in the making of vocal sounds is a show of what there is in the soul.’  

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One tried and trusted approach to grasping the ever elusive esse, thing-in-itself, apeiron, fixed “exact conclusions” about reality, God, the unreachable “depths of soul,” so on and so forth, is the via negativa. Both Wittgenstein and Cusanus in their respective manners employ such an approach. In his Tractatus, with quite a finesse for detail, Wittgenstein clipped and groomed his way down a via positiva to arrive unexpectedly at the boundless and mystifying via negativa “where-of one cannot speak.” Cusanus unabashedly pursued the twilight groves of a tenebrous Absolute and even with constant recourse to the divine calculations and clarification of mathematical symbols and diagrams, he abdicates to the “camp of mysticism” and

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163 Shibayama, Zen Comments on the Mumonkan, 209.  
the paradoxical ineffability of the *via negativa* and also saying an awful lot about what cannot be said. The *via negativa* is not taken as a means of keeping the Heathen “uninitiated” from the ambrosial scent of the Divine and nor is to be thought of as an evasive means by which to eschew definition.

It can be that the clearest spoken or written account gives so very little information, important information is not always easily nor clearly conveyed. Information that might otherwise be conveyed by the initiated activities of the imagination, for example, by the infinite possibilities in the interstices of interpretation, by the pregnant enigma of silence, by the slight twist of a flower and a glittering iris. Information conveyed in other words, through the *arcus iris* of metaphor.

Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.\(^{165}\)

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Interlude II: Again M. Jourdain provides an unsuspecting model for the fraudulence of frippery in his ludicrous extrav-organzas of attire. As language acts as a disguise by which the real thought is concealed, the plumes and satins of the nobility can supposedly conceal the ingenuous bourgeoisie beneath its virago sleeves, reticella collars and galligaskins. In the case of M. Jourdain however, his authentic self could not be disguised under any amount of hosiery and headwear because he did not have the outer form of language quite right. Part of the deception of language is its persuasive charms and beguiling ways. If these are not in place then the spell will not be cast.

v. On poetry

Temperament veils and tints, the individual cannot escape their own projection of the world, caught in the refractive glow of mood’s light ‘each and every thing we see or hear contains our individuality.’1\textsuperscript{166} Poetry is the recorded observation of a direct and pure experience, that is, according to Nishida an experience that is always relative yet unified. It precedes the distortions that occur through the opposition of subject and object and is a single activity that is in interrelationship with a universal sole reality. Poetry is not always about the laments and joys of our discombobulating existence but is also a dry and flowery account of reality; a natural science with literary skills. The reality evoked by this coded language is most poignantly individualised even whilst expressing universal principles. Poetry is an express conception of the world and existence that applauds and honours the unspeakable, unfathomable and unknowable, it is the most direct way of saying something without knowing what it is that is to be said.

In his own particular and untiring crusade, a dedicated quest for cosmic clarity, Cusanus treads the time honoured paths of the ‘Ancients’ and ultimately yields to the abstractions of mathematical symbolism to illuminate his way. His conviction that the mathematical sign is the only way to divine knowledge compels him to challenge the pre-eminence of Thales with uncontained rapture at the genius of Pythagoras, and he queries, ‘who was the first philosopher in fact?’1\textsuperscript{167} Tooting in celestial concert with the unknowable dimensions and harmonies of the spheres, he believes that ‘the more we abstract from sensible conditions, the more certain our knowledge is.’1\textsuperscript{168} There are, however, many modes of travel to arrive at the same understanding and the vehicles of carriage do not necessarily use the same paths. Although their quest is not dissimilar, and nor indeed their method for that matter, there are however, certain conflicts between opinions regarding the expression of the equally ardent missions of Cusanus and Nietzsche.

In his impassioned apotheosis of the Übermensch (Superman) Nietzsche decries all abstraction as delusional misdirection and beseeches ‘you should follow

\begin{flushright}
166 Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, 49.
167 Cusanus, Of Learned Ignorance, 26.
168 Ibid., 25.
\end{flushright}
your sense to the end!’ for ‘the poets lie too much.'\(^{169}\) And in another scathing rant in *Human, All-too-Human*, he even further indicts the “wizardry” of poor poets as conscientious treachery:

All that is generally called reality, the poets, conscious of this power, proceed with intention to disparage and to distort into the uncertain, the illusory, the spurious, the impure, the sinful, sorrowful, and deceitful. They make use of all doubts about the limits of knowledge, of all sceptical excesses, in order to spread over everything the rumpled veil of uncertainty. For they desire that when this darkening process is complete their wizardry and soul-magic may be accepted without hesitation as the path to “true truth” and “real reality.”\(^{170}\)

Never-the-less, with this withering damning of the occult thaumaturgics of poetry behind us, with the poets we go, our stalwart guides, most suitable crafts for crossing into the Dominion of “invisible things.”

In his maiden work, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida Kitarō sets out on his life’s philosophical trajectory to ultimately alight at the hallowed grounds of *basho*, a self-determining locus of bi-directional dynamic expression between the absolute or universal and the individual or particular. Nishida may not be known for his poetic flair, though it could be said the sometimes criticised abstruse nature of his prose shares something with the often obscure expression of the poet.\(^{171}\) What-ever his persuasions, he does make known early on in his career a distinct regard for certain poets. In *An Inquiry into the Good* he quotes the Romantic poetry of German writer Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) to make his point about a ‘true reality prior to the separation of subject and object.’ This “true reality” is unified, independent and self-sufficient. It does not differentiate between mind and matter and is constituted equally by volition and feeling as objective dispassionate knowledge. The ability to capture and express the complex of activities involved in this reality may very well lie in the mastery of the poet. Nishida writes:


\(^{171}\) See chap III for further comment on Nishida and poetry.
As a concrete fact, a flower is not at all like the purely material flower of scientists; it is pleasing, with a beauty of colour, shape and scent. Heine gazed at the stars in a quiet night sky and called them golden tacks in the azure. Though astronomers would laugh at his words as the folly of a poet, the true nature of stars may very well be expressed in his phrase.\footnote{Kitarô Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 49.}

Cusanus keeps company with the very same he claims as ‘all our wisest and most divine teachers,’ (though it is not he that includes himself in such rarefied society, but I) who, ‘agree that visible things are truly images of invisible things and that from created things the Creator can be knowably seen as in a mirror and a symbolism.’\footnote{Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, ‘Cusanus at Sea: The Topicality of Illuminative Discourse,’ The Journal of Religion, 71, no. 2 (Apr., 1991): 183.} Thus perceived reality is the “through and through real” surface of true reality which is imperceivable and unknowable.

Of neither water, air, earth nor any other body, but of some infinite nature besides, the apeiron can only but have been conceived through the ‘inner vision’ of Anaximander, as claims Jaspers,\footnote{Karl Jaspers, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plotinus, Lao-Tzu, Nāgārjuna: From the Great Philosophers: The Original Thinkers, trans. Ralph Manheim and Edited by Hannah Arendt (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974), 4.} and imagined or “knowably seen” through the reflective illumination of symbolism and metaphor.

Marc Chagall describes an increasing despair at the impotence of old belief systems and wonders if the resulting, perhaps natural, turn away from the vagaries of ‘religious spirit’ have not had an over-all disheartening and withering effect on the creative outlook of man. He asks ‘Doesn’t this so-called scientific gift of nature, by emptying the soul, limit the source of poetry?’ In the face of the ‘contracting scene’ of progress where can the depth and meaning now be found that can answer to the ‘throbings of a world, its sighs and its dreams?’\footnote{Eliade, Symbolism, the sacred, and the arts, 86-91, from ‘A dialogue with Marc Chagall: Why Have We Become So Anxious?’}

\section*{On mathematics}

The problem with poetry is its wordyness. Even though each word, divinely appointed, may be the only way to frame the gap, the void through which apophatic knowing issues its formless form, and each word, divinely appointed, may be the
only way to contain or carry the delicate aither of the ineffable through to the denseness of our perception in this weightiest of worlds, the word is not ever a simple world. The message carried by such a complex and tricky chaperone is not necessarily trustworthy; the tint of such a peculiar hue the original colour is indiscernible. What’s more, how really can we imagine the mystery and immensity of the universe, Divine Reality, to be conveyed by anything, much less than a little scribble or squeak? Borges expresses similar concerns when it comes to the voluble pontifications of philosophy, ‘It is hazardous to think that a coordination of words (philosophies are nothing else) can have much resemblance to the universe.’  

He is entitled to critique his own world, his internal and infinite library of Babel but he does so with such poetic deftness that he weakens the merit of such questioning and perhaps not unwittingly appeals to the very cause he wishes to condemn. 

Such intricacies and contradictions in fact make a sound case for words being the perfect reflection of the universe. However, putting aside these small persuasions to the contrary, perhaps mathematics and geometry are a much more reliable and appropriate language for divining the meaning and structure of reality? And perhaps this is why so many philosophers have turned to the abstractions of the mathematical sign, like Cusanus, as mentioned earlier, like Pythagoras who inspired him to do so, and also like Bruno, Wittgenstein, Nishida and Russell who all make appearances here.

The mathematical sign and formula hold such promise of clarity, potentiality, exponentiality and impossibly infinite finites drawn out in evanescent meetings called wonderful things like oblique asymptote (very poetic). Nicholaos John Jones is another more contemporary figure to add to the list of philosophising mathematicians. He gives a thoroughly boggling account of the internal and external negations of the soku-hi logic that the Kyoto School philosophers are the famed exponents of. The nature and form of soku logic is that of paradox. How can paradox be broken down into a logical formula? One could be assured that what-ever had been explained by the logical formula procured from such deductions that it would be anything but the logic of soku-hi that had been explained. Like the Tao, once named then it is no longer the Eternal Tao that is being named, it is something else. This something else, as in a via negativa may get us closer to understanding

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176 Borges, Other Inquisitions, 114.
what the Tao is, but by no means can we ever say “Eureka! I’ve got it!” What Jones does is ‘remove the appearance of contradiction from the logic of soku (soku hi) through the presentation of a formal system for this logic.’ 177 Therefore he is not explaining away the paradox 178 but is finding a way to demonstrate how it can exist without rendering itself meaningless through absurdity. Meaningless to a system of objective logic founded on a principle of non-contradiction that is. Otherwise a kōan would do. Jones presents a very convincing case for the place and value of soku logic, and he does so in the language of the accusing party, which is the only way to convince the opposition.

As Dilworth notes on the system of logic developed by Nishida, which happens to be an example of one of the finest uses of soku-hi logic, the logic only makes sense from within the system itself, or rather, the system he develops and the depths he goes to within it is precisely for the benefit of completing the system he is developing which then becomes a self-enclosed unit. Having said that, Nishida’s logic of nothingness and the basho structuring does provide a logical framework in which to situate the full face of human experience in relationship with the absolute, and this is no small feat and nor is it a self-enclosed unit, quite the contrary. The point being that it is very rare to speak in a foreign language to yourself, but of course makes complete sense to speak in the same language as to whom-ever you are speaking speaks. That is not always possible however, and often the possibility is driven by choice.

Nishida was unique in many ways, but perhaps mostly for his insistence on creating a concrete logic that could account for the hitherto seen as unaccountable and ineffable. The challenge Nishida undertook was to meet the ‘silence of the saints’ with a verifiable report of what they had experienced. Dilworth writes in his introduction to Nishida’s Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview, ‘To Nishida, the philosopher can reflect on the via negativa forms of religious expression, including Zen Buddhist’s notorious “method of no method,”’ no less than

177 Nicholaos John Jones, ‘The Logic of Soku in the Kyoto School,’ in Philosophy East and West 54, no. 3 (Jul., 2004): 302
178 I use “paradox” here rather than “contradiction” in the manner I have used it elsewhere. Paradox as a positive encounter with contradiction, a state of resolution that maintains distinctions without conflict, nor indeed contradiction. Dilworth defines the difference between a dialectical and paradoxical logic as one of union through negation in the former where-as the latter ‘exhibits the dynamic tension of affirmative and negative without synthesis.’ See David Dilworth’s introduction to Nishida, Last Writings-Nothingness and the Religious World View, 29.
he can reflect on scientific procedure, the process of aesthetic creativity, or moral behaviour.¹⁷⁹

Jones has also put forward his argument in the appropriate terms for the receiver and with integrity to the individual uses of the soku logic within the Kyoto School. A very small sample from his formulations is as follows:

(T1) \[ P \leftrightarrow \neg P \rightarrow \Rightarrow \neg P \]
Proof: Suppose \( P \). Then \( \neg P \) (by \( \neg \)-intro). So \( P \rightarrow \neg P \). Suppose \( \neg P \). Then \( P \) (by \( \neg \)-elim). So \( \neg P \rightarrow P \).³⁹

(T2) \[ \nu(P) = T \Rightarrow \nu(\neg P) = T \]
Proof: Let \( Q = \neg P \). \( \nu(P) = T \equiv \nu(\neg P) = T \) (by Df1) \[ \equiv \nu(\neg P) = T \] (by T1) \[ \equiv \nu(Q) = T \] (by Df1) \[ \equiv \nu(\neg P) = T \] (since \( \neg P = Q \))

(T3) \[ \nu(\neg P) = T \]
Proof: \[ \nu(\neg P) = T \] (by T2)

One has to ask, even considering the very crude and unjust manner in which I have just represented a very thorough and insightful investigation by Jones, does this new language really get us any closer to understanding? In this case I think it better to do away with signs altogether and twist flowers instead, with the odd slap in the face for emphasis. But then given that this episode is about the movement away from understanding then I should commend such executions of the cerebrum.

### o. Elusive understanding: whose language?

A not incidental connection between Heraclitus, Dōgen and Nishida is the criticism they all received for their obtuse and recondite language. Yet this criticism comes in the face of them all exhibiting a masterful use of language through word-play, neologisms, double-entendre, puns and paradox. One particular confrontation between Nishida and a well-known literary critic, Kobayashi Hideo, resulted in Kobayashi dismissing the impenetrable style of Nishida as ‘a bizarre system that is neither in Japanese nor, of course, in a foreign language.’¹⁸¹ As an eminent scholar

¹⁷⁹ Nishida, Last Writings-Nothingness and the Religious World View, 6.
¹⁸⁰ Jones, ‘The Logic of Soku in the Kyoto School,’ 311.
and translator of the Kyoto School, Heisig himself agrees that Nishida’s ‘language can seem hopelessly matted at times.’¹⁸² But as Heisig concedes, the discontinuities of his style must be accepted as ‘they reflect the creativity of his way of thinking and of his adventure of ideas as a whole’¹⁸³ and they are also a direct effect of the bridging between the radically opposed discursive traditions of the East and West, a feat of semantic engineering very few had been willing or even interested in attempting prior to Nishida’s arrival on the philosophical landscape. Perhaps most important though is the fact of the necessity of his language, we must assume chosen, very particularly, to transmit his message. A style of language that not only reflects his creative thinking but that is also the form of those thoughts, not just their explicative arrangement.

Kahn identifies the same necessity of expression in the ‘tantalizingly enigmatic’ pronouncements of Heraclitus which he refers to as ‘linguistic density.’¹⁸⁴ The consistent and deliberate use of ambiguity by Heraclitus is a tactic of evocation that ‘methodically undermines all certainties’¹⁸⁵ and requests of the reader an engagement which an explicit exposition would never be-able to achieve.

The problem of understanding may be one more of reception than delivery. Nietzsche aims his own “numerous complaints” at people who in their dissatisfaction and discomfort at what they might be reading blame the style of the author, ‘such dissatisfied people are also responsible for the numerous complaints about the obscurity of Heraclitus’s style. The fact is that hardly anyone has ever written with as lucid and luminous a quality. Very tersely, to be sure, and for that reason obscure for readers who skim and race.’¹⁸⁶ We may recall from the previous episode a very similar statement directed by Beckett to the public reader of Joyce, ‘and if you don’t understand it Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it…The rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation.’¹⁸⁷ Such

¹⁸² Heisig, The Philosophers of Nothingness, 76.
¹⁸³ Ibid., 35.
¹⁸⁴ Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 89.
complaints by the dissatisfied reader are not only the affectation of aesthetic percipience but inadvertently expose the plaintiff as somewhat wanting in sensitivity. Heraclitus remarks that he is misunderstood even before he is heard, which does not indicate a train of psychic aural connectors along the Ionian coast but a people who had already decided what they thought and what something to be correctly understood should sound like, if they preferred not to listen that is. Some two and a half millennia later, Heidegger is still battling the same thorny barriers put up by the embarrassed resistance to new relationships with language. He asks if we have any idea what kind of relation we have to the language we speak and how we might live with it, how it lives with us and how the two form each other. He suggests it ‘might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand.’

Sometimes, the meaning exists between understandings. Many of the Heraclitean fragments can be read from multiple perspectives with equal conviction. This is the “linguistic density” that Kahn refers to and it recalls the various means of right understanding that are demonstrated through the symbolism of the “skin, flesh, bones and marrow” in the fascicle *Kattō* of Dōgen. Without making one reading more correct than another understanding is suddenly expanded because of the processing required to navigate multiple meanings and simultaneously hold all to be true. Thus Kahn says of the ambiguity of the fragments that ‘the difficulty of deciding between them is itself the intended effect.’

Allegations not only of stylistic obscurity, but the invention of entirely new languages, private idioms that no-one could possibly understand shroud the reception of these vagrant thoughts attempting touch down on any willing runway. Even Kasulis, the master of Dōgenese and *mitsugo* transmission submits his charge; ‘It is regrettable that Nishida never fully recaptured some of the clarity and simplicity of the prose he used in *A Study of Good*. One of the misfortunes of his trip to the dragon's cave was that he came out speaking Dragonese.’

One of the many remarkable feats of Dante’s great work, *The Divine Comedy*, was that it was written rather revolutionarily in the regional dialect of Tuscany and not in the expected Latin. Dante is known to have strived for a unified

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Italian language that could become the new language of literature and to this end Beckett remarks:

He did not write in Florentine any more than in Neapolitan. He wrote a vulgar that could have been spoken by an ideal Italian who had assimilated what was best in all the dialects of his country, but which in fact was certainly not spoken nor ever had been. Which disposes of the capital objection that might be made against this attractive parallel between Dante and Mr Joyce in the question of language, i.e. that at least Dante wrote what was being spoken in the streets of his own town, whereas no creature in heaven or earth ever spoke the language of Work in Progress.  

Indeed, even Borges as an ardent admirer of Joyce felt pressed to admit, or at least make some-one admit (the other Borges perhaps, ‘the one things happen to’  

192) that ‘we have those two vast and – why not say it? – unreadable novels, Ulysses and Finnegans Wake.’  

Another surprise litigant is Hopkins, whom is now considered the pre-eminent scholar of Cusanus yet still levels his own misgivings against this ‘partly bizarre Renaissance mind.’ Hopkins summarily introduces some of the issues which have plagued the reception of Cusanus’s work; ‘All in all, the writings of Nicholas Cusanus display a perturbing impenetrability which has militated against their being enthusiastically received by the Anglo-Saxon philosophical community,’ and also else-where he writes, ‘the speculative and highly metaphysical character of Nicholas’s writings render them especially difficult to comprehend.’ So, not only the nature of his thoughts but the manner in which he expresses them prove complex and far from clear.

I think at this point it would be safe to surmise there is a direct connection between these two “issues,” and not only in the work of Cusanus. This is confirmed at least in part by Heisig in his summation of the criticism Nishida’s stylistic

191 Beckett, Disjecta, 30-1.
194 Even though by all accounts the more recent translations of the work of Cusanus by Jasper Hopkins have replaced the supposedly inadequate and antiquated work of Heron, I prefer it and the majority of quotations in this thesis are taken from his 1954 translation.
195 Hopkins, A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa, 15.
196 Ibid., 7.
Second Episode

Idiosyncrasies have borne the brunt of, ‘I conclude that simply to chide him for not having written simpler prose is to ask him to be a different kind of thinker. The discontinuities in his style reflect the creativity of his way of thinking and of his adventure of ideas as a whole, and must be accepted.’

No idea is static. It changes in response to perception, to how it is received by the mirror reflecting it. Much like the idea of transmission given by Kasulis in his approach to translating and reading Dōgen, and just as Benjamin contends no translator can be absent from the translation, the reception or understanding of an idea undergoes the same treatment. Even in one’s own language translation is required for challenging ideas that are expressed necessarily in a new language, one befitting most probably of the newness of the idea. This was the dilemma facing the critic Kobayashi in understanding, or rather, not understanding Nishida’s bizarre new language of “Dragonese.”

There is another element at play in the elusive mysteries of creation, something to do with unity and contradictions. There seems to be a design of melding, straddling, forging and bridging underlying the recondite perplexities of transmission. In Nishida’s case it is clear, since he stated so himself, he was forging specific paths or bridges between the philosophical traditions of east and west. To keep up with the lead, Heisig recommends swinging a leg over either side of the fence, ‘his literary style reflected his attempt to cast bridges between worlds that had been walled off from one another. To read him is to be obliged to the same straddling that defies simple affiliation with either of those worlds.’

Simone Weil expresses the same thing but by suggesting discretion in the language one chooses, depending on which side of the fence one treads, ‘it is simply that the language of the market place is not that of the nuptial chamber.’ Finally, in the work of Heraclitus, the bridging between waking and sleeping worlds, the forging of meetings between beginnings and ends, the melding of extremes are all supported by the structure of the prose alone. Then upon this structural support, his bridge of scaffold, there is the *logos* and the layers of meaning all bound together as one indivisible system:

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198 Ibid.
his style is a manifestation of his conception of the world. He views nature as part of a “logos-textured world” in which our experiences are laden with meaning. But the layers of meaning are hidden. Our encounters with Heraclitus’ text are much like our encounters with the world: the superficial meaning conceals a deeper structure and reality.\textsuperscript{200}

\section*{\pi. The concrete and everyday reality: lived experience}

The deeper structure of reality cannot be immediately perceived and it may never be encountered in the dense layers of outer meaning. Like an impenetrable marzipan sarcophagus encasing the fruity innards, the cake of our desire remains aloof, like the ‘fruitless waiting’,\textsuperscript{201} Adorno designates as authentic metaphysical experience. However, it may be experienced in the most humble of tea drinking moments once the idea of fruity cake has been put aside.

Drinking tea, eating rice,
I pass my time as it comes;
Looking down at the stream, looking up at the mountains,
How serene and relaxed I feel indeed!\textsuperscript{202}

The poem quoted above is a response to what Nansen meant by ‘everyday thought.’\textsuperscript{203} Suzuki explains the poem as the experience of one full of Zen, whose life tone has been altered by the over brimming cup of \textit{satori}. From this ‘perfectly normal state of mind,’ which is that of \textit{satori} ‘The drinking at the moment to him means the whole fact, the whole world.’\textsuperscript{204} The whole world squeezed into a sip of fragrant tea, like a ‘moon in a dew drop.’\textsuperscript{205} Though it is not the tea that contains the whole world, but the sip. Not the thing, but the fact.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{201} Adorno, \textit{Metaphysics, Concept and Problems}, 143.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid. Nansen who killed the cat was an eighth-century Chinese Zen master.
\textsuperscript{204} Suzuki, \textit{Essays in Zen Buddhism}, 265.
\textsuperscript{205} This is the poetic and powerfully symbolic title of Kazuaki Tanahashi’s book on the fundamentals of the \textit{Shōbōgenzō} and Dōgen. The phrase is inspired by the Genjōkōan.
\end{flushleft}
1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.
1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by their being all the facts.\textsuperscript{206}

There is a vast and sonorous chorus proselytising the everyday, it is not only religion or spiritual endeavour that prevails upon the immediacy of our quotidian encounters to transmit the effulgence of epiphany. But also the rational mind, the scientific and the pragmatic all turn to what is right here immediately and directly in front of us in the concrete facts of the mundane. Where would science be today without Archimedes’s sudsy ritual of bath-time?

Descartes also arrived at his famous dictum through the reflective observations of his immediate and particular circumstances. With recourse only to his present surroundings he illustrates the first phase of his Method, the active principle of doubt working towards clarity. In a fabulously genteel vignette which entails the description of himself seated by a fire in his dressing-gown, having finally obtained for himself ‘assured leisure in peaceful solitude’\textsuperscript{207} Descartes proceeds to unfold what is possibly the most renowned philosophical meditations and all by the simple means of his setting. Another reclining pontificator is struck by the bright light of true reality as he observes his idyllic surrounds,

Gustav Fechner said that one morning, while relaxing in a chair in the Rosenthal in Leipzig, he gazed in the bright sunlight at a spring meadow with fragrant flowers, singing birds, and flitting butterflies and became engrossed in what he called the perspective of the daytime, in which truth is things just as they are, as opposed to the colourless and soundless perspective of night found in the natural sciences.\textsuperscript{208}

Looking into ‘reality at its most essential level,’ Adorno attempts to rescue metaphysics from the demonization of theology and re-instate a principle of absolute into the individual experience of life in an immanent sense. He arrives unequivocally at the decision that to do so with the hope of anything genuine coming out of it ‘we have no option but to measure by our concrete experience.’\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{206} Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus}, 5.
\textsuperscript{208} Nishida, \textit{An Inquiry into the Good}, xxxiii.
\textsuperscript{209} Adorno, \textit{Metaphysics, Concept and Problems}, 121.
Significantly challenging the dominant trend in Heraclitean scholarship of promoting the abstract over the concrete, Benitez proposes an entirely new premise for the import of the Heraclitean fragments. He puts forward the idea that what Heraclitus is doing, more than anything else, is providing a form of skilful training by which to navigate not only the meaning of the fragments but the myriad ambiguities of life, a form of ‘dynamic wisdom.’ The value of this wisdom is of equal benefit for the titivations of the intellect as the quotidian rhythms of practical daily life. Benitez selects three fragments to demonstrate his proposition, all of which house a little dust or dung from the daily grind: Fr. D. 9 Asses prefer garbage to gold, Fr. D. 124 The fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings, and Fr. D. 87 A fool loves to get excited on any account.\(^{210}\) The emphasis of Benitez’s analysis is on a reading that does not eliminate the abstract nor give primacy to the concrete. Nor is it insistent on arriving at some doctrinal cosmology that can in turn give meaning and provide solutions to the fragments themselves, not to mention life, the universe, and everything. By using objects and activities that do not immediately manifest qualities of great importance, like “garbage” and “sweepings,” one is naturally directed to presume there are hidden layers of meaning, but like the patriarchs ‘behaviour of drinking tea and eating meals’\(^{211}\) that is so significant in Zen Buddhism, this does not mean we are to randomly sweep aside the activity as insignificant. No, the activity itself contains all there is, it is not inconsequential, it is vital. Yet great importance cannot be placed on it otherwise it would lose its vitality. There-in lies the rub.

Put somewhat differently: after Hegel too much was asked of art, but now almost nothing is asked of it; and nothing is asked just because too much was asked of it. For the asking was improper. Art was treated as a god, but it is not a god, and when treated as such, it is an idol.\(^{212}\)

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\(^{210}\) These translations are taken from Kahn to be consistent with the rest of fragments quoted but Benitez uses his own translations as follows; Fr. D. 9 Asses would prefer garbage to gold, Fr. D. 124 A random heap of sweepings, the most beautiful (world) order, and Fr. D. 87 A foolish man is wont to get excited on every account … Garbage is variably translated as straw, dung, refuse and chaff, but gold seems to be the unanimous and unchanging choice.

\(^{211}\) Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-Eye Treasury*, 293.

In Nishida’s *basho* of ‘true nothing,’ both being and nothing are enveloped in a ‘peri-logical’ lived experience; ‘The oppositional relationship between form and matter is established in [this] *basho* of lived experience.’\(^{213}\) The structuring system of *basho* that Nishida develops is not able to be explained by means of any ‘so-called logical form’ but rather it is meant to explain logical form, and ultimately this logical form comes down to ‘true lived experience’ that subsumes knowledge; ‘True lived experience entails the standpoint of complete nothingness, a free standpoint separate from knowledge.’\(^{214}\) That is, at the base of any real experience there lies nothing, complete nothingness. Liberation from being paradoxically allows the “true lived experience” to exist. Freed from objectification lived experience enters into its essence. According to Heisig, Nishida was convinced of the meeting ground where eastern and western philosophies fused and that ‘the real way to get to it was through a relentless pursuit of the “depths of ordinary, everyday life”.’\(^{215}\)

Throughout his magnum opus, *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani demonstrates with unyielding persistence that the everyday world is precisely where – without it being a place or thing – the field of emptiness can be found, or rather, experienced. He strives to combat any possible misunderstanding brought about chiefly by the perspective of ‘objective transcendence’ that might keep us removed from this very real experience. To this end we are directed to the work of Meister Eckhart as a relative form of what he means and which he believes ‘takes its stand on the immediacy of everyday life.’\(^{216}\) Indeed there are some distinct correlations between the Godhead of Eckhart and the Absolute Nothingness of Nishitani. Both have a profound awareness of the ‘subjectivity of egoity’ and both exact a ‘high praise for the practical activities of everyday life.’\(^{217}\)

\(^{213}\) Kitarō Nishida, ‘Basho’ in *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarō*, trans. with annotations by John W.M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5. See nt. 25, 65 for explanation of the choice of this neologism by the translators; ‘In order to translate *hōronriteki*, the translators have taken the liberty here to coin the neologism “peri-logical.” The Japanese *hō* with its verb form *tsutsumu* has the sense of “envelop,” “embrace,” “wrap,” “comprehend,” “include.” “Subsumptive” would not be an accurate translation as it is used instead to translate the compound *hōkatsu* so that “subsumptive logic” translates *hōkatsu ronri*. To translate *hōronri* as “enveloping logic” or “the logic of envelopment” would be accurate but cumbersome. The translators decided upon the Greek prefix *peri* (*περ*), which has the spatial senses of “around,” “about,” “round about,” “surrounding,” as well as the verbal sense of “enclosing” or “wrapping.” With verbs it can mean “concerning” or “about.” And in noun form *ta peri* means “circumstances.” All of these senses together make *peri* the most appropriate term for translating *hō*.’

\(^{214}\) Nishida, ‘Basho’ in *Place and Dialectic*, 5.


\(^{217}\) Ibid., 65.
In the philosophy of Zen the state of transcendent illumination (satori) is inherent in all beings although it may not have yet blossomed, but lies dormant like a seed eternally poised awaiting favourable conditions. The climate of enlightenment is not some remote and idealised island of sunshine and coconuts but lies in a very grounded and intimate connection with the everyday. This is why Dōgen sites our daily meals as carriers of great and profound suchness. He also means to indicate the passage, the way to attainment. It is through the passage of daily ritual and commonplace activity that the diurturnal reward of lucid knowing is gleaned.

The true nature of things or the Dharma-nature (Hōshō) is present in everything in the same way. It is the essence of all things, the essence of the universe. Each thing has its own suchness or hōshō as an innate intelligence, an untutored ‘or natural wisdom.’ Hōshō could start to sound like another transcendent principle or originative substance that can never be fathomed or reached. It is that, but it is also very real. Dharma-nature does not do away with the appearance of things and look through the illusion to a greater reality, the greater reality is in all things and activities as their Dharma-nature. In the fascicle Hōshō, Dōgen quotes from Zen Master Baso Daijaku who says; ‘Dharma-nature: putting on clothes and eating meals, speaking and conversing, the working of the six sense organs, and all actions, are totally the Dharma-nature.’ In an alternate translation of the Hōshō fascicle by Thomas Cleary, the nature of things is expressed quite simply as ‘eating breakfast, eating lunch, having a snack.’

p. A ship of fools: mythmaking

In what he suspects might be ‘a foolish, an insensate flight’ into the more vulnerable interstices of perception, where ‘cognition holds it breath’ Steiner makes a ‘step embarrassing beyond words.’ He gives this passage of embarrassment the ‘almost technical’ name of transcendence. To attempt this embarrassed passage beyond words, where we must leap like fools off the ladder, off the 100 foot pole and into the twilight glow of unknowing, he follows the guiding prow of Dante; ‘Dante is

218 Dōgen, Shōbōgenzō: The True Dharma-Eye Treasury, 172.
220 Steiner, Real Presences, 200.
of help when he tells of “turning the bow (la poppa) towards morning.” 221 And within this wonderful gesture turns the serendipitous “step embarrassing beyond words” and we are off on our *folle volo*, with our bow astern.

Mythology is seated deep in the foundations of our most basic and core understandings of life. Within the malleable form of myths is the chaotic image of the universe in its most spectacular guises. Further even than that, as Schelling would have us believe, mythology is the universe represented ‘in its absolute form,’ and done so with a poetic form that at once expresses the universal through the particular and is the universal it particularises. 222 In an unexpected twist Beckett imbues myth with the sort of objective status that has seen the demise of these magnificent allegorical transmissions:

Moreover, if we consider the myth as being essentially allegorical, we are not obliged to accept the form in which it is cast as a statement of fact. But we know that the actual creators of these myths gave full credence to their face value...It was precisely their superficial metaphorical character that made them intelligible to people incapable of receiving anything more abstract than the plain record of objectivity. 223

As if the more ridiculous something is the more readily we can accept it for we are not obliged to believe it, yet, it does get in. Sneaks on stage from the wings and juggles with our heads. The “superficial metaphorical character” of myth masks, with the illusion of reality, the real reality of its illusion. The conversion of superficiality into substance by the farcical fact of reality is another instance of Nishitani’s “through and through real” mask, not of persona this time, but of myth. 224 The dialectic revelation of myth is a bidirectional process between the Divine as creator and created. The classical myths were not so much stories as states of this dialectic revelation. They were living entities undergoing constant renewal. According to Wiles the classical myths of ancient Greece ‘were endlessly

221 Steiner, *Real Presences*, 200. Note: “la poppa” is the stern of the boat not the bow, and the phrase in question occurs in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno* ‘having turned our stern toward morning.’
224 See chapter I, 4. *Prosópon* and Real Appearances.
malleable, and constantly renewed through a rich variety of poetic recitation, image, song and dance. The originally performative nature of myths made them a living and transformative state that had immediate and concrete effect. Far from being merely explanatory historical records of genesis and conception they kept the motions of creation creating whilst being created.

The “plain record of objectivity” may clarify and confirm, but it also refines nearly “out of existence” those subtle but vital unspeakables that are represented through myth. The natural sciences that replaced the mythological conception of the world were not actually addressing the same questions, and they certainly couldn’t answer them. As Eagleton comments on the explanations of life provided by Christianity suddenly being made redundant by the telescope and microscope; ‘It is rather like saying that thanks to the electric toaster we can forget about Chekhov.’ Likewise the scientific descriptions of the world do not answer the questions posed in mythology – they are of an entirely different standing, one cannot resolve the other.

The wiping out of myth is not possible, we just form new ones that are prone to be taken more seriously according to the climate of the times, the ‘paper Leviathan’ too heavy to resist. If the arc of metaphor can bridge worlds and be the messenger between gods and (wo)man may the ark continue in its insensate flight and fool the sensible and free the foolish.

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Second Stasimon

Enter Chorus. Advancing due east, chorus members turn their busts as far as possible towards the north and at the same time fling out the right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then turn the bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time fling out the left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again turn the bust as far as possible towards the north and fling out the right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again turn the bust as far as possible towards the south and fling out the left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until reaching the destination, at which point chorus members can sit down. The arms dangle throughout in perfect eqipendency.¹

Third Episode

In a State of Unknowing

Being Ruin Time
Prima facie, ruins are inert, inanimate sites of large stones in various stages of decrepitude or restoration. There are usually small stones too. Very much like abandoned grave yards, full of inaudible history, monumentalized broken life and sentimental visitors. The comparison is not an idle one, for apart from the surface similarities, of which there are many, there lays beneath the toppled pediments and fallen angels a most potent symbol of the mysterious regenerative forces of life and death which in mutual negation and affirmation form a rich source of fuel indeed for a cosmic fire.\(^1\) Cenotaphs to the unremitting presence of death in life, a presence of absence that is encountered as an affirmative negation and which completes the true image of life, as ‘true life must include death. Death is essential to life.’\(^2\)

Inspired by Florence Hetzler’s notion of ‘ruin time’ as a unifying process that views the ruin as a state of being, the ruin is conceived of not as a monument to our remote past and harbinger of an inevitable future, but as a nexus of continuous activity that makes perceptible a paradoxical co-existence of presence and absence and unifies time in an absolute present. Through the lens of Nishida Kitarō’s logic of basho (place or locus) and Dōgen Kigen’s concept of uji (being-time) ruins are re-navigated adrift from their historical and archaeological berthing’s and take on a new metaphysical significance as a locus of demonstrative becoming.

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\(^1\) On the belief that Heraclitus asserts fire as an elemental principle I would agree with Kahn in that Heraclitus means it as a symbol rather than an actual originative substance. This seems to suit the subtleties and metaphors of his thinking far more and would avoid making the mistake of disregarding his own instructions on how to read him, ‘treating the mode of expression as irrelevant to the meaning’ a grave mistake indeed, one that Beckett would add a tenebrous peal of admonishment to.

Though the philosophies of Nishida and Dōgen are grounded in the characteristically eastern precepts and practice of Zen they both in many respects share a particular resonance with Heraclitus of ancient Greece, one of those great thinkers who like Dōgen is renowned for his supposed obscurity. His work survives in fragments, many of which are recorded through secondary sources and whose true meaning and authorship is under continuous doxographic scrutiny. Perhaps one of the better known fragments would be ‘As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them.’³ The dynamic and unifying forces of continuous flux conjured by this metaphor in association with the principles of co-origination and the simultaneous arousal of being and time that we find in Nishida and Dōgen respectively form the basis and directional enquiry of ruins that is here proposed. As much as a determined form as an indeterminate formlessness, the ruin seems to transcend itself whilst becoming more itself and through this continuous visible becoming invites its visitors to do the same. The ruin is conditioned by an obvious impermanence that is paradoxically a permanent impermanence. To borrow the idioms of Nishitani and Dōgen, it is an infinite finitude laid bare in being-time. This is not about the ruin, but through the ruin. As a physical site it is essentially a spatial construct, as a historical site it enfolds time within its construction and deconstruction, as an instrument of transmission it transcends itself as a physical site and enters into a co-creative expression of ‘a momentary self-determination of the absolute present.’⁴ It is not a site of ‘merely quantitative forces’⁵ extended spatially, it possesses the vitality of continuity, what Leibniz posits as a requirement of a truly active being.⁶

The written form of this episode attempts to invoke an imaginary movement through a site of ruins. The particular site is not specified, for the flâneur of the imaginary who is identified as the perambulatory peruser of the ruin, should not be inhibited by such moderations. However, the truly august, evocative and numinous ruin of Ephesus is suggestively featured not only on account of its stated qualities but

⁵ Ibid., 50.
⁶ Leibniz is referring specifically to a biological being over and above a merely physical being, and whilst an archaeological site of ruins is not normally conceded as either, I am however, suggesting it is both. Leibniz’s theory of individual monads has tentative associations with the seriatim passage of being-time.
because its fragmentary remains coincide with those of Heraclitus, a most outstanding citizen of the historic city and whose place in this thesis is of no small influence.

In the following account ruins are apprehended beyond their phenomenal rendering that considers them primarily as grand scale artefacts of human-kinds prodigious trail through the eons and encounters them on the noumenal plane. Here in the clouded stratosphere of unknowing ruins are no longer inert and inanimate sites but are activities of resonant being. By means of Hetzler’s mode of ruin-time in which the active and vital principle of nature applies its spontaneous palette, the ruin is converted from a has-been into an is-being. The irreversibility of time is transformed as the site becomes one of end to endless beginnings.

Nishitani sees the ‘incessant becoming’ of our own existence as an outcome of the causal nexus of being and time. Caught in this nexus we are condemned to constant activity which is the form of being-in-time that becomes ‘our nature as time-being (or being-time).’ From site to insight the ruin is the living similitude of our positioning in this causal nexus of time and being. Its ponderous flow of non-resistant self-determining expression is in absolute harmony with the natural flow of creation.

Fragment I
Resonance

Tacit keepers of a vestigial and mysterious resonance of unknown origin, ruins shelter a guarded covenant between the is and is not (soku-hi). The fragmentary remains once colossal and now irrevocably collapsed, scattered amongst tenacious weeds and perhaps an enduring tree, normally solitary, are charged with a presence that confounds the expected passage of time. The resonance of ruins solicits a mode of enquiry that steps outside the demarcated excavations of archaeological discovery. The quiescent resonance of a ruin as ‘an immediately perceived presence,’ may superficially be construed as the lingering vestiges or spectral remains of a past now

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vagrantly occupying the groutless cobbled ‘ground of the present,’\textsuperscript{9} but in fact, the inaudible reverberant tintinnabulation of this resonant appeal, is the silent air of a gateway bell. A threshold, a momentary crossroads of infinite contradiction, the causal nexus of space and time, a paradox of affirmation through negation, the eternal now of being-time, the numinous and mysterious moment that opens up in the bottomless depths of nihility as a true absolute nothingness that is the wellspring of all things and being. An illuminated niche, a propylaeum to the ultimate basho, the field of śūnyatā, the gaping yawn of χάος, a hiatus of interminable duration in the blink of an eye, the ‘infinite openness of nihility at the ground of the present.’\textsuperscript{10} Yes, all this amidst the alluvium and Corinthians.

Nishida names a ‘pure quality as the root of reality’\textsuperscript{11} that is the only thing truly immediate to us. Notwithstanding the various misunderstandings that such a phrase as “pure quality” beckons he contextualises it within the greater structure of his basho as that which signifies something deeper than an act, thing or substance. Something that ‘entails a tranquil and…the most immediate existence.’\textsuperscript{12} This pure quality can be understood in the locus of ruined time, in ruin time, as the resonance of ruins – a tranquil immediate nothingness that is not a thing or substance.

Within another ‘tranquil mood,’\textsuperscript{13} swelling like a gentle tide, there rises the numinous of Otto, and within the resonance of ruins something of this subtle swelling presides. The thrill, awe majesty and even the element of tremulous awefulness that he inscribes in the mysterium tremendum of the numinous have their presence in the ruin. With the full contrast of experiences that make up the mysterium tremendum intact, an ‘absolute overpoweringness,’\textsuperscript{14} awakens in the perambulatory peruser of the ruin. Witness to the vacant forces of time as it stands crumbling against its own exertions the contemplative visitor may well feel an overwhelming awe akin to what Otto describes as an experience of the numinous: an awakening to something outside of oneself, a sensation that rises up and overwhelms

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\textsuperscript{9} Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 230.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 239.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 19.
\end{flushleft}
with a discombobulating apprehension. The majestic proportions of history now transformed into vacant spaces of a disquieting and intangible fullness.

**Fragment II**

Similitude

Ruins are a living metaphor in the sense that al-Ghazālī uses metaphors as literal embodiments of the given similitude, not merely symbolic of, but ‘as if.’ The principle of “as if” is the major point of difference between Šūfī writings and traditional Islamic philosophy which holds that there is nothing of God that can be seen in this world since God is beyond this world and primarily accessible through the rational faculties. The imaginal dimension that is permitted full bloom by both Ibn al-‘Arabī and al-Ghazālī is the key translator of the “as if” principle. Ibn al-‘Arabī writes ‘Had the Lawgiver not known that you have a reality known as “imagination” which possess this property, he would not have said to you “as if you see Him” with your eyes. Rational demonstration prevents the “as if,” since it declares through its proofs that similarity is impossible. As for sight, it perceives nothing but a wall.’ Not very helpful.

In direct contrast is Dōgen’s Buddha-nature, which having an entirely non-substantial nature cannot be represented by anything, neither symbolically nor in similitude, but instead is that thing, it is the ‘whatness’ of each and every thing. Yet even with these radical differences I contend that both perspectives are represented aesthetically and metaphysically in the ruin.

In his explication of the niche, glass, lamp, olive and tree, al-Ghazālī presents a world view in which matters no less than ‘the structure of the cosmos and the human soul’ are at issue. In much the same way Nishida’s logic of basho encapsulates a way or view of placing the self-determining consciousness in full dynamic bi-directional relation with the world and ‘it is in this transpositional form that our worlds of consciousness construct the world’s order and continuity.’

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18 Nishida, *Last Writings*, 52.
Third Episode

Appropriating the model versed by al-Ghazālī in his ontological and epistemological explanation of the Qurān’s Light Verse in *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*) ruins are introduced here as the similitude of our own movement through being and time as self-determining individual expressions and as ‘monads of eternity’\(^\text{19}\) that embody the life-*sive*-death and death-*sive*-life structure of real existence. The understanding of the individual as a self-determining yet co-originating mutual expression is derived from Nishida’s final development of his logic of *basho* and the religious self-consciousness. Attendant and simultaneous to the individuals self-determining expression is the dynamic transactional formation of the world. Using Leibniz’s terminology of “monads” to substantiate and contextualise his own formulations of the consciously active individual, and the structure of the human-historical world as a self-contradictory identity Nishida is able to simplify his intent in the following; ‘each monad expresses the world and simultaneously is an originating point of the world’s own expression.’\(^\text{20}\) This is then qualified and restated in his particular lexis of contradictory identities, ‘As such the act is a bottomlessly self-contradictory identity: it reflects the world in itself, and reflects itself in the world (the absolute other). Thus the act lives to die and dies to live. Each moment of time both arises and perishes in eternity.’\(^\text{21}\) The “act” as he calls it is the existential self and the same contradictory identity of this self is also displayed in the contradictory forces that are at work in the ruin. The combined life (of nature) and death (of structure) of the ruin perform the “life-*sive*-death” and “death-*sive*-life” mode of being that Nishitani presents as a kind of ‘double exposure.’\(^\text{22}\)

This same mode of being in turn can be thought of as a similitude of the creative act as it both negates and expresses the absolute. It negates it by expressing it, but in the only way possible which is in a finite dimension that can never express the true absolute. Each act, and this act could be the existential self of Nishida but also the creative gesture of making and the creative act of *being*, is ‘like the various tomographic plates of a single subject.’\(^\text{23}\) Each has its own reality no less true than any another but only by being superimposed together does any picture of true reality emerge.

\(^{19}\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 266.
\(^{20}\) Nishida, *Last Writings*, 53.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 19 and 53.
\(^{22}\) Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 93 and 52.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 52.
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Fragment III
A movement through: the flâneur

But grits upon the earth, crumbs of a great feast, ruins are remarkable not so much for their sufferance of the savages of time, their consumption and obliteration, but rather for their extraordinary endurance, their digestive and transformative abilities in the face of such an insatiable appetite. A once monumental buttress now provides a make-shift and humble seat; in its time an impenetrable and fortifying wall now creates a lace work of framing to view the surrounding landscape. Wandering with the delicate shuffle of reverence normally observed in houses of God, national galleries and cemeteries, the perambulatory peruser of ruins is the flâneur extraordinaire.

As if a nonchalant scrape could portend the final fall of the fading Empire that we now suddenly have access to, or in a moment of unconscious obliviousness, stumbling over a reclining head we give a small kick to the left nostril of Artemis, or, in mounting the closest rock to survey the view one finds oneself ingenuously crowning the ravaged remains of a noble statesman, the flâneur of the imaginary – our perambulatory peruser of ruins - moves with a tentative languor through the crowds of history, incognito under the guise of untraceable years. Ruins are the Holy Sepulchre of the devout historian, but it is not just history that imbues the remains that remain with a resonant presence, ungraspable but palpable, it is something else altogether. It is the Isness. Which is pretty much everything.

Is not a site of ruins the ultimate home for the ‘perfect flâneur’? Perhaps the only true flâneur is a flâneur of the imaginary, not Baudelaire after all.

The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world - impartial natures which the
tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.  

What Nishida’s basho proffers up to the flâneur of the imaginary is an all-enveloping visionary domain. An entirely mirrored and infinite arcade: endlessly circumnavigating and reflecting the world, generating the world as it goes.

**Fragment IV**

The temple of Artemis: a goddess of contradictions

It is said Heraclitus dedicated and deposited his book in the splendidious and grandiose temple of the Ephesian Artemis. This may be because there was no library in the city at that time or because it was simply traditional to place gifts and treasures of value in temples for safe keeping. Perhaps it was as a sign of his devotion to Apollo’s twin, or again perhaps, as Diogenes surmises, because he was an arrogant snobby elitist who didn’t want the hoi polloi getting their hands on things that were clearly beyond their capacity to comprehend. Diogenes further implies that the whole enterprise of Heraclitus was made purposefully obscure so that only those with ‘rank and influence’ could access it. His supposed obscurity has another dimension to it and that is in connection with the Delphic oracle, the voice of the ‘lord’ or Apollo.

Even though Apollo has come to be associated almost exclusively with light and clarity (in contradistinction to his Dionysian counterpart) he in fact draws his remarkable powers from most intimate affiliations with what might be considered the ‘dark side.’ In the Milesian colony Istria on the Black Sea, Peter Kingsley tells us he was known as ‘Phôleutêrios, the god of lairs and incubation.’ Kingsley also traces the mythic and historic connections of Apollo with the underworld and a...

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25 One of the seven wonders of the ancient world that, as legend has it, put the other wonders quite in the shade. ‘The Artemesium must have been incomparably the most opulent Greek temples of its time’ A.W. Lawrence, *Greek Architecture* (Pelican History of Art, 1957), 136.
27 Fr. D. 93 The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign.
28 Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (California: Golden Şüfi Center, 2010),169.
particular connexion with serpents that leads Kingsley to some extraordinary and contentious insights into hither-to-ignored mystical and shamanistic traditions in the pre-Socratics.²⁹

Through a gradual assimilation of the regional deities the Ephesian Artemis became a peculiar combination of opposing forces. Those of fertility, abundance and child birth on the one hand, whilst also being a symbol for virginity, and on the other being renowned for her unsurpassable skills as a death dealing hunter; in other words life and death.³⁰ This combination of antithetical ideas is entirely consistent with the unification of light and darkness in the form of her twin Apollo. In Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus: A Psychoanalytic Reading, Jessica Ann Mayock describes Artemis as ‘a goddess of contradictions’ who as a bridging figure between opposing forces and places, at once separates and binds. Mayock also points out the connection of Artemis with the transition that marks the passage between adolescence and maturity.³¹

Transitions and metamorphoses are where the tensions of opposites become co-creative and harmonious. Crucial to Heraclitean thought is the very same balance of harmonious tension between opposites. This is most explicitly expressed in Fr. D. 51 ‘They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.’³² Both the bow and lyre are symbolic attributes of Apollo, the lyre being his chosen instrument, (as with Zarathustra) and Artemis as the legendary huntress is also unsurprisingly often represented with bow and arrows in hand.³³

A telling connexion it is then between the symbolic elements of birth and death, a seemingly contradictory union, that are representative of Artemis and the harmonious tension and everliving flow that merges life with death in the mutual

²⁹ See Kingsley, In the Dark Places of Wisdom and Peter Kingsley, A Story Waiting to Pierce You: Mongolia, Tibet and the Destiny of the Western World (California: Golden Šūfī Center, 2011).
³⁰ She has connections with the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele which meant the emphasis was moved from the virginal to the fertile and explains the many breasted Ephesian statue of Artemis.
³³ See also Fr. D. 48 The name of the bow is life; its work is death. This is a word play on the Greek for life and bow which are both bios but one carries an accent over the ‘o’. This fragment possibly illustrates even more clearly the co-originating contradictory identity of self-determination that Nishida is demonstrating through his logic of basho.
point of beginning and end (Fr. D. 103 The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle\textsuperscript{34}) that has come to characterise what we know of the philosophy of Heraclitus.

**Fragment V**

The absolute

Nishida determines the absolute as a contradictory identity that possesses its own absolute self-negation. He maintains the true absolute must be opposed to nothing. Therein because nothing stands opposed to it, the absolute must express itself by negating itself. This is the paradoxical structure of life itself. As Nishida contends, ‘every living being must die’ and in death every living being, or relative being, must face an absolute. In fact the facing of this absolute undoes the relative being, ‘when a relative being faces the true absolute it cannot exist.’ Nishida quotes the passage from Isaiah 6, 5 when Isaiah faces and sees God, saying, ‘Woe to me! For I am undone.’ Isaiah’s undoing is his confrontation with the absolute, or in this particular encounter, ‘the King, the Lord of hosts.’\textsuperscript{35} His relative being cannot withstand the resplendent fulgour of such apotheosis.

Nishida is careful to distinguish between the death that is an encounter with the divine through dying and the objective death of the self that in dying can no longer relate to anything, let alone bask in the gloriousness of non-relative being. The death he wishes to speak of he says lies outside the framework of objective discourse. The death that ‘involves a relative being facing an absolute’ is a paradoxical form of encounter where-in the absolute is expressed through its own negation. This form of death displays the same cosmological dimension as Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence as it becomes a participatory dynamic in the world-time continuum. In the confrontation with the absolute that signifies the death of the relative lies the very life-force and essence of the absolute. As there is nothing that can oppose the absolute, it must possess its own self-negation, and this paradoxical form of self-contradiction of the absolute means that it is not simply non-relative. If the relative did stand in confrontation with the absolute then the absolute would be non-relative, but it also would cease to be absolute, it must contain the relative

\textsuperscript{34} Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 75.

\textsuperscript{35} Nishida, *Last Writings*, 68.
within it, hence its own self negation and hence ‘the true absolute exists in that it returns to itself in the form of the relative.’

Even though the absolute does of course transcend the relative, without the relative being at the same time immanent in the absolute there would be nothing. Without it, life, creation, the gesture of God, the creative act, would fall utterly back into silence without ever having made a sound. Without the relative, without ‘this little,’ the absolute would lose all contact with the ‘quintessence of its own emptiness.’

As a form that contains its own self-negation and in which nothing stands opposed to it the absolute must be absolutely nothing. The self-negating act of self-expression realised in the absolute nothingness of Nishida curbs the extremism of absolutism that would render it a form of pathological delusion, as Nietzsche decries ‘everything absolute comes under pathology.’ The absolute in Nishida’s terms comprehends all the contradictions and dis-equilibriums of our convoluted world and expresses them simultaneously through presence and absence, ‘The world of the absolute is the dynamic equilibrium of the many and one, a world constituted in the relation of simultaneous presence and absence.’

Fragment VI
From the formed to the forming, the created to the creating

Creation is taking place unstoppably at all times. It is not only that things are created, but those created things are at the same time creating and that they are creating, the act of creating, is what they are. This is meant in the same sense as Suzuki’s illuminations on the questions created by the intellect being ‘the intellect itself.’ Somewhat more poetically, and with the imagery of Dōgen’s fascicle Kūge (Flowers in Space/the Sky) Suzuki explains, ‘It is not the eye that sees the flower or

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36 Nishida, Last Writings, 69.
38 Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. and ed. Marion Faber (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42. epigram 154. This statement is essentially politically motivated as we see by the aphorism closely following ‘Insanity in individuals is something rare – but in groups, parties, nations, and epochs it is the rule.’ Epigram 156.
39 Nishida, Last Writings, 89.
the stars, nor is it the flower or the stars that are seen. The eye is flower and stars; flower and stars are the eye.” In Kūge Dōgen inverts the usual understanding of the appearance of phenomenon and makes the effect the cause. He says it is not that real dharmas (things, phenomenon and also actions) exist because of the real world but that the world ‘abides in its place in the universe because of real dharmas.’

The interpenetration of illusion and reality, or, the so called objective world and the appearance of phenomenon within it, and the interdependency of cause and effect adopted by Dōgen are both rendered in the continuous evolution of absence in the ruin that determines its presence and form.

Ruins in the full capacity of an active similitude demonstrate the absolute near side where “life-sive-death” and “death-sive-life” are manifest as one and the same. The continual processes of renewal and decay that mutually and simultaneously create and destroy the ruin, display the fleeting moment of Nietzsche’s augenblick, where past and future chance in the ‘indifferent gateway of the moment.’ The intersection of time and being that is present in the ruin gives visible form of the relation between existence and Buddha-nature, described as the ‘mutual identity and mutual penetration’ of the co-creation of myriad things in the vehemently non-dualist philosophy of Dōgen.

Nishida’s conception of the creative world takes this principle of non-dualism and turns it into an active matrix of self-transformation that is always ‘moving from the created to the creating.’ This is the active principle at work in the creation of a ruin keeping it constantly alive through its eternal movement “from the created to the creating.” At the end of his precursory evaluation of “limit” Zellini celebrates the paradoxical revelations of ‘cognitive intuition’ that allow for the ‘possible final victory of the potential over the actual, of absence over formal presence.’

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44 Hee-Jin Kim, Dōgen Kigen – Mystical Realist (Tuscan: The University of Arizona Press, 1975), 165.
45 Nishida, Last Writings, 74.
46 Paolo Zellini, A Brief History of Infinity, trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2005), 36. He founds his hopes on certain passages in the work of Cusanus and confirms them through others in the Tao Te Ching, for example ‘Thirty spokes. Share one hub. Make the nothing therein appropriate.’
not in contradiction to this victory but in full (broken) support, paradoxically gives formal presence to absence.

The incessant becoming of the ruin, whose form from the created to the creating and whose endless life is a sequence of endings of beginnings, is, as the circle inscribed by Heraclitus’s aphorism “the beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle,” not an infinite regress but egress. The pendulums “arc of metaphor” traces its eternal path in the ceaseless “swinging back and forth over nihility” that Nishitani prescribes as the movement of our incessant becoming and which I transcribe into the remains that remain of the ever forming ruin as it passes through phases of destruction which herald the resurrection of yet another becoming. ‘Our existence is an existence at one with nonexistence, swinging back and forth over nihility, ceaselessly passing away and ceaselessly regaining its existence. This is what is called the “incessant becoming” of existence.’ Is this ceaseless becoming the resident presence, the haunting resonance of ruins?

Viewed through the final standpoint of Nishida, ruins can be seen to express the self-transforming act of real creativity that is determined by an identity and relationship between absolutes and relatives, ‘Creation, real creativity, entails that the world, the contradictory identity of the one and the many, expresses itself within itself; it is its own self-transforming process in the form of a movement from the created to the creating.’ Reciprocally, if Nishida’s perspective is viewed through the similitude of the ruin, this constant movement from the formed to the forming, the created to the creating is concretised through the immediacy of the palpable and physical, a process which we are able to actually see in the ruin, albeit on its most superficial level.

**Fragment VII**

The illustrative guide of ruins: the form of emptiness

Ruins are not merely urns charged with the ashes of our historical heritage. These treasured reliquaries of sublime unease are gardens through which we are bid to wander with wonder. Sublime because they conjure that numinous awakening to something other outside the self and unease because they conjure the awe and

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awefulness of the *mysterium* tremendum. Ruins exist in a removed and remote time zone of their own making, yet are somehow unified with all the other sites of ruins in the world through a vibrational stasis. An eerie vacancy of life permeates the ruins atmosphere which is at once alive and charged with a quiet intent, a nigh explosive inertia. But in time, at a different pace, the impenetrable stillness reveals the rhythm of its vibrational stasis. It is an unlikely wave-beat that we would do well to keep time with, but the visitor is oft-pressed to leave too soon.

The form of emptiness so apparent in the ruin is an emptiness with the capacity of fullness. It is the form of emptiness that Dōgen describes as ‘a piece of rock in emptiness.’ 49 This emptiness is an absolute emptiness in the form of emptiness. By this he does not mean that form is emptiness and emptiness is form in a dualistic dialectic but that form absolutely is form and emptiness is absolute emptiness in form and emptiness. It is an entirely non-objectifiable position that frees the intrinsic emptiness of true form to reveal itself. When the purpose of a form is no longer apparent then its true form of emptiness transpires.

A Doric triglyph buffeted by the breath of a millennium becomes a new dolmen resisting interment and masquerading as a piece of rock in emptiness.

**Fragment VIII**

Ruins as hierophanous sites

I have already touched upon the sea as a hierophanous site with reference to the seaborne epiphany of Cusanus, and hinted at the heights of reverie and illumination Nietzsche obtained from the rarefied air of a mountain summit. I would also like to commission ruins to the register of hierophanous sites. It is not so surprising that the potency and sheer overwhelming magnificence of the natural world can inspire revelations of equable magnitude and perhaps less likely that such an existential conversion could occur within the artifice of our constructed world. As Stambaugh writes of the observations within contemplative exertion or practice that

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lead to awakening ‘this occurs most readily and appropriately with nature; it is less likely to occur, for example, with an oil refinery.’

Ruins however, may enjoy the privilege of being an exception to this arbitrary rule because of their peculiar positioning between ‘the human-made and the nature-made.’ The natural forces of ruination integrate with the human-made structure and in a confluence of times and being, create a new dimension of nature. The unity and exchange between the divine (nature) and human (structure) that is the being-time of the ruin could ostensibly provide the ideal site for epiphany.

For example, and this again relates to Nishida’s self-negating and forming absolute which I have previously alluded to, the self-determining individual of Nishida is consciously self-formed only in confrontation with its own absolute negation. This confrontation comes about as a realisation of the ‘bottomlessly contradictory depths’ of the individual self as it is at the same time an expression and negation of an absolute. The self-expression of the individual in fact means the self-negation of the absolute. When the individual stands in the radical dimension of existential ‘decision between eternal life and death’ a whole new abyssal field of life-sive-death opens up.

Suppose this teetering individual happens to be contemplating the alluvial swamps of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus, the native city of Heraclitus, a once opulent and resplendent centre on the Ionian coast of Asia Minor and now an archetypal ruin of majestic proportions about five kilometres inland in present-day Turkey. I do not think it implausible that an atmosphere of such radical and unified contradictions as that of a ruin could be the site of an existential revelation that brings about a confrontation with the absolute within the individual. And what more appropriate place for this conversion could there be than the home-ground of Heraclitus, philosopher of cosmological logos, the identity of opposites and indefatigable self-searching.

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50 Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence is Buddha-nature; Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality*, (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 1990), 110.
52 Nishida, *Last Writings*, 93.
Time in Ruins

Time passed may very likely be the initial perception of time in the ruin. But once the subtle persuasions of the ruins tenuous being seep through our skin-bag and into the resonant depths of our cellular structure and then out the other side of that, a hiatus may occur in which our own fleeting moment of being melds with the overwhelming magnitude of all that lies before us of what lies behind us, both equally incomprehensible. Poised here at a precipice of wonder, incredulous at a nondescript lump of worn marble, we may come to comprehend the seriatim passage of being-time as it creates the present being of ruin time. The expressivity of time is not found in the comings and goings which fly past unhindered, ungrounded and unbelievably. The real expressivity of time is encountered in its incompleteness. This is also its entry point where it is imbued and interacts with being. The myriad cycles of time whilst recurring incessantly are always changing, and in the ‘unchangeability of the endlessly changing’ impermanence stamps its mark. The eternal moment is one of movement, and in its infinite bottomless depths, is free of time. The movement is that of the eternal now of becoming, in the stillness of an everliving moment. The ruin houses this eternal becoming as a resident presence and sits in the crossroads gateway of augenblick. We may not see ourselves as having anything to do with what passes through this gateway. Certainly there is a remoteness, an inaccessible otherness that pervades the arrested time of a ruin. So much so that we might feel it all so far removed from where we stand, but where we stand is right there in the midst of it, at the gateway itself, being the gateway. Just as Nietzsche recognised himself as part of the causes of eternal recurrence, that without him in fact there was no eternal recurrence, such is the message of the ruin. The time and being of a ruin is never separate from our own time and being. As we stand amidst the flow of ruin-time we too form part of its being as we are simultaneously formed by it.

Third Episode

**Fragment IX**

Impermanence

In a lonely grotto on the grounds of the Villa Serbelloni, David Wiles discovers a humbly hewn figurine of Bernadette Lourdes kneeling in beatific devotion to an alabaster Virgin, he describes the vision in his introduction to *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy,* ‘as a common mortal the luckless Bernadette was only made of plaster, she had lost an arm, and her face was little more than a white blob.’ But the effect of this muted and compromised visage was such that, for Wiles, it conjured the ritual, religiosity and reality of Greek tragic theatre in a way that had it been perfectly preserved, painted or sculpted, would undoubtedly have failed to have been captured. The featureless eloquence of Bernadette’s transfigured face is not after-all unlike the masks of ancient Greek theatre, though it was not in reference to this that Wiles experiences the proximity of the remote past in his contemplative reconnoitre of the Villa’s illustrious gardens that lead to his encounter with the pious “white blob.” Rather, it was the rawness and immediacy of the tableau whose ‘expressivity stemmed in part from the passage of time written into her features, which tied the past to the here-and-now of present performance.’ The expressivity of times passage, even if through the happenstance of the caves dripping eaves, takes form in the unassuming and artless Bernadette. Like the apparition of the Immaculate Conception before which she now kneels in perpetuity, Bernadette manifests the same ephemeral vagaries of materiality that normally separate the real from the mystical. In contrast, the Virgin’s solid casting eternally arrested in alabaster, opaque yet luminous, defies the ineluctable pull of nullification that lies at the bottom of all being and time.

Time is at all times on the verge of vanishing, and all things show the frailty of being that keeps them ever poised on the brink of collapse. Time and being display a constant pull to nullification from beneath their very ground. That is impermanence.56

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55 Ibid., 14.
56 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness,* 222.
Fragment X
Gateways in time: recurrence, re-creation and infinite finitude

In Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* a “gateway” marks the moment of union where the opposing paths of past and future come together. Nietzsche names this gateway *Augenblick*, customarily translated as “Moment,” but more literally rendered would be ‘in the blink of an eye.’\(^{57}\) This momentary twinkling of an eye is the dwelling place of all time, it is the crossroads of the ‘long lane behind us: [that] goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us – that is another eternity.’\(^{58}\) Nietzsche’s revelation of eternal return is given full expression in the figure of Zarathustra.\(^{59}\) We are given a small insight into the arrival and admittance of this revelation into the reticent, trembling mind of Nietzsche/Zarathustra in ‘The Stillest Hour,’ the final chapter of part two of *Zarathustra*. ‘I tell you this in a parable’ we are alerted, which artfully hints at the double device of the tale. Zarathustra is told by ‘something’ that he must speak bravely of his knowing; ‘Speak your teaching and break!’ beseeches the ‘something.’ The teaching could be both what he has received and what he now has to impart, but Zarathustra balks at the command. Finally the ‘something,’ full of compassionate mirth at his fearful folly (though it tore and ripped at the heart of the now ashamed Zarathustra) declares, ‘O Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe but you are not ripe for your fruits!’\(^{60}\) Thus the ‘most consequential discovery of his career’\(^{61}\) withdraws for further incubation into the silence of solitude.

Certainly the airing of such a radical doctrine as this supposedly was must be approached with caution, with parable, fiction even. The device of philosophical literature can be traced back to Plato’s dialogues, and in fact the “teaching” of eternal recurrence fully expounded in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is in many ways, supported by the notions of reincarnation and immortality presented in Plato’s *Phaedo*. Loeb argues for the significance of this poetic and fictional narrative in

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59 Zoroaster – from Zoroastrianism.
60 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 169.
both Plato and Nietzsche as a form of filtering that separates the sincerely interested or ‘appropriate’ reader from those that might indulge in “the rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense” as Beckett most appositely puts it. So it is with the ‘expectation that his appropriate readers would come to share his belief in the truth of eternal recurrence,’ but only after the examination and testing that the symbolic form of a fictive narrative necessitate that Nietzsche (and Plato, according to Loeb) makes the deliberate and poignant choice of voicing his beliefs, on this, “sein schwerster Gedanke,” his most weighty thought through a fictional character – albeit one based on an actual historical figure, the revolutionary religious prophet Zoroaster/Zarathustra.

Presage to the full consequences of the revelation as it unfolds in Zarathustra are the preliminary warning tolls in The Gay Science. Loeb convincingly proposes that the development of this most weighty of thoughts, eternal recurrence, has cosmological proportions that hint at a fellowship with Heraclitus (extraordinary event that that would be if Diogenes is to be taken verbatim, but then they would make quite the dynamic duo – even without suits) and has overtones of the Pythagorean theory of eternal recurrence. Through the synecdoche of an hourglass, an image introduced in The Gay Science and repeated again in Zarathustra, the temporal cosmological implications of eternal return are sifted through the dust flecks of being in an ‘explicitly time-centred, cosmological image of a perpetually revolving eternal hourglass of being.’ The finite time of the cycle of the hourglass could represent the individual lives within the greater universal life cycle as the hourglass is infinitely turned. But as a synecdoche for the ‘immeasurably greater, but still finite’ cosmic structure of eternal return it also represents the time it takes for the course of the cosmos to reach an end and start over again exactly as before. Since any single human being is merely a grain of sand in this hourglass-cosmos, it follows that he is also perpetually turned over—that is, dies and is then reborn so as to live a qualitatively identical life.

62 Loeb, ‘Eternal Recurrence,’ 3. The idea of information being filtered through devices meant to withstand the unintiated is also suggestive of some interpretations of mitsugo “secret talk.”
63 Stambaugh, Nietzsche’s Thought of Eternal Return, xi.
64 Loeb, ‘Eternal Recurrence,’ 23-25. There are also implicit associations with the Pythagorean tradition of explaining the cosmos in musical terms. In Zarathustra song and dance are regularly evoked to invite and compound understanding.
65 Ibid., 25.
66 Ibid., 26.
From the first mention in *The Gay Science* an important expansion occurs in *Zarathustra* to account for what Loeb attests to as the greater cosmological dimensions of the theory or doctrine, if we can call it that; perhaps vision, insight or revelation would be more befitting. The significant import of the development lies in the ‘self-recreating’ structure of the cosmos. This is demonstrated through the shift from the synecdoche of the music box which occurs in *The Gay Science* to the hourglass of *Zarathustra* and then to the “colossal” or “monstrous” cosmic year within which ‘the small, ordinary years’ are contained. The images of the hourglass and music box did not admit the contextual amplification of the internal temporal structure in accordance with the “immeasurably greater” cosmic temporal structure in the way that the inter-related cycles of years can. “Year” is used as a metaphor for a comprehensible concept of finite time which also, however, re-occurs infinitely within a ‘great year of becoming.’ Nishitani also understands and presumes the greater world-time or “Aion” daimonstrated through the synecdoche of finite life and samsāra – the cycle of birth-and-death in Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence.

This same continuous seasonal balance of infinite finitude is expounded by Heraclitus in numerous fragments as it is by Nishitani in his expositions of śūnyatā, time and history in *Religion and Nothingness*. In Fr. D. 30 the stable ordered world ‘the same for all’ provides the structural foundations for an eternal cycle of change ‘kindled in measures and in measures going out.’ Nietzsche pays homage to this double helix of flux and order in his configuring of the incessant becoming of eternal return ‘there is a great year of becoming, a colossus of a year: this year must, like an hour-glass, turn itself over again and again, so that it may run down and run out anew.’ Nishitani’s explication of what he terms “infinite finitude” expands on Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence so that the “selfsame life” lived eternally, is radicalised through an encounter with the “original self” on the home-ground of absolute nothingness. As with Loeb, Nishitani also observes the connections with Heraclitus and says we could in fact call the unbounded meaninglessness of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, which is overcome through the Will to Power, a “‘voluntaristic,” modernised version of Heraclitus.”

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68Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 237.
70Ibid.
As well as suggesting Nietzsche could be read as a modernised version of Heraclitus, Nishitani also appeals to the standpoint of Dōgen as a compatible approach to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence; ‘we seem to be breathing the same pure mountain air.’ As the present moment of Nietzsche’s eternal return ‘draws itself after itself’ it follows the “seriatim passage” of Dōgen’s uji. As past and future are present in each moment or augenblick as it returns eternally to the very same moment in time, the gateway that marks the crossroads of past and future can be understood as the eternal now of both life and death. The augenblick of death is the moment of re-birth at an intersection of time and space. It is only at the moment of death that the truth of eternal recurrence is revealed, this is the ‘midnight Augenblick of death’ as it occurs in The Gay Science. The gateway inscribed augenblick as it occurs in Zarathustra explicitly refers back to The Gay Science – a slowly developing idea that Nietzsche imagines continuing without him, his pending absence somehow already present within him, perhaps disclosed through his daimonion. Thus spoke Zarathustra.

The self-creating cosmology of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence starts to display the same inseparability of being and time that characterises Dōgen’s concept of uji. Relayed through his animals, Zarathustra tells us, ‘I myself am part of these causes of the eternal recurrence,’ and that being part of these causes ‘I shall return eternally to this identical and self-same life.’ Also, whilst the eternal recurrence of Nietzsche has definite affinities with the ‘interminable finitude in birth-and-death,’ it does not reach the bottomless depths of the true finitude espoused by Nishitani and also falls short of his true infinity.

This true infinity, in Nishitani’s reckoning, as opposed to “bad infinity,” is a confrontation with the intrinsic nature of life as death, death as life, or put in another way samsāra-sīve-nirvāṇa. Where-in the cycle of birth-and-death, known as samsāra in Buddhism, is nullified by embracing the life of death in nirvāṇa. In other words, nirvāṇa, as a death to the life of birth-and-death cycle, is therefore “life” in its essential sense’ as it is hence an end to death. Adopting the term from Heidegger, “being-unto-death,” Nishitani explains that the ‘essential conversion from true finitude to true infinity’ is a breakthrough of this “being-unto-death” to a truly new

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73 Loeb, ‘Eternal Recurrence,’ 30.
74 Ibid., 13.
75 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 237.
life in the leave taking of the endless cycle of samsāra, or in other words, eternal recurrence. What he calls “bad infinity,” (or schlechte Unendlichkeit), taken from Hegel, is for ‘the finite to continue on infinitely,’ and this is what he means by infinite finitude. But, when ‘one’s own finitude is represented as finite, as something that will one day cease to be’ then the existential conversion of an infinitely finite ‘Existenz’ overcomes the logical contradiction of infinite finitude. In a re-emphasis of this point Nishitani further qualifies true finitude on the level of samsāra-sive-nirvāna as ‘the real suchness of birth-and-death, its reality, its bottomlessness.’ Actually, in vigorous and unequivocal confirmation he calls it ‘truly true finitude.’

This true infinity is nothing other than śūnyatā (emptiness) and in the paradoxical logic of the soku hi (is and is not) true finitude is only truly true in its conversion to true infinity. That is, the true infinity encountered in Existenz, ‘is an essential conversion from “death” in its basic sense to “life” in its basic sense’ which is thus a conversion ‘from true “finitude” to true “infinity.”’ Existenz, according to Nishitani, is the only way through which an awareness can arise of true infinity, for ‘Infinity, as a reality, is cut off from the prehension of reason,’ therefore it can only be experienced or understood as a lived possession and not as a merely conceptual dimension.

Fragment XI
The stillest movement: eternity and the infinite

The ‘infinitesimal moment of every becoming,’ as it is delightfully phrased by Gaston Milhaud, belies the constancy of eternity with the eternal movement of becoming. It is within the framework of the paradoxical logic of the Prajnaparamita

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76 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 176. It should be noted that Nishitani’s conception of true infinity and emptiness is indebted to the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra, considered the ‘absolute centre of the central sutras’ in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The following short passage from the Heart Sutra (which is also the most concise of all the sutras) brings to light the significant influence it has on Nishitani’s philosophy: ‘form does not differ from voidness, and voidness does not differ from form. Form is voidness and voidness is form; the same is true for feeling, conception, volition and consciousness.’ Tripiṭaka Master Hsuan Tsang, trans. The Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra. Commentary by Grand Master T’an Hsu, English translation by Venerable Master Lok To, http://www.buddhanet.net, Buddhanet’s Book Library, 2000, 27 and 84.

77 Ibid., 170.

78 Ibid., 181.

79 Ibid., 177.

80 Zellini, A Brief History of Infinity, 140.
Sutra tradition that Nishida endorses the present as ‘the eternal present.’\textsuperscript{81} Only through a logic of paradox can the simultaneous presence and absence of eternity be understood to be contained within each moment, and indeed be precisely what makes up each moment. As Nishida further explains, ‘Each instant of time, which does not stop for even an instant, is the simultaneous presence and absence of the eternal present. Each instant is the paradox of samsāra and nirvāna.’\textsuperscript{82}

According to Nishitani, while the \textit{augenblick} of Nietzsche stretches infinitely into the future before us and infinitely into the past behind us, it ‘does not possess the bottomless of the true moment.’\textsuperscript{83} He grants that the eternal recurrence of Nietzsche does come close to the standpoint of śūnyatā but because it is grounded in an eternally recurring moment it is not free of time and is not therefore bottomless. To experience the bottomless of the true moment, which is to be free of time, is to \textit{be} time rather than be in time ‘by realizing that I am not \textit{in} time because I am time, which therefore means that I am \textit{free from} time.’\textsuperscript{84}

The stillest movement of time that is the eternal moment of the present as it is cut off from the past and future is like the bow of Heraclitus which turns back on itself and the road that both up and down is one and the same. It is the vertical movement of time which assures the eternal presence of the moment. Stambaugh explains what she calls the “vertical vibrancy” of Dōgen’s equivalent to the \textit{nunc stans} or eternal now, ‘the moment does not fly away. It moves, but within itself, or, as Dōgen also says, up and down.’\textsuperscript{85} The other radical aspect of Dōgen’s time concept elucidated by Stambaugh is its reversibility. The utter overturning of any constancy or lineality that might be found in the usual progressive framing of time establishes time as an eternal passage of flow occurring not \textit{in} time but \textit{with} being ‘all at once, all of it, every moment anew.’\textsuperscript{86}

This brings a whole new appreciation to the activity of eternity as an infinitely endless becoming. It is only when time is \textit{not} irreversible that we can say, as did Heraclitus, “the beginning and the end are shared” or otherwise it would be

\textsuperscript{81} The \textit{Prajnaparamita Sutra} tradition comes from a collection of eight main sutras the first of which is believed to originate from around the first century BC.
\textsuperscript{82} Nishida, \textit{Last Writings}, 89.
\textsuperscript{83} Nishitani, \textit{Religion and Nothingness}, 215-6, and see 181 for full moment.
\textsuperscript{85} Stambaugh, \textit{Impermanence is Buddha-nature}, 50.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 45.
‘time endlessly open in both directions from the present.’ The eternal sameness of a recurring moment as in the eternal return of Nietzsche implies a reversibility of time. As David Loy states of Dōgen’s eternal present of time, it is ‘a very different present which incorporates the past and the future because it always stays the same,’ and that to experience this present we need to be present and ‘be the present.’ Nishida offers further elucidations on this “monad of eternity” the eternal now, and makes the eternal present a perfect unity of opposites ‘Past and future are confronting each other, as the dialectical unity of the present.’ Perhaps nowhere else is this dialectical unity as explicitly present as in the ruin. The ruin may be superficially sensed as a broken, an abandoned or bent gnomon where the passing of time is no longer registered.

In the confrontation between past and future they dissolve into the present moment in which they find themselves, the only true time. They are in effect negated by each-other; they cancel each-other out in their moment of face to face meeting. Their illusionary existence is seen through, and they disappear like mirages on a desert plateau on approach. Even though they are illusionary they exist within the present moment; that is the only place they exist. In his very emotive appraisal of the ancient Greeks Nietzsche ascribes an extraordinary power of intuitive thinking to Heraclitus’s vision of time. This ‘regal possession’ awakens Heraclitus to the true passage of time, and he sees that the ‘past and future are as perishable as any dream, but that the present is but the dimensionless and durationless borderline between the two.’ It is a rather misty borderline between the two, Nietzsche and Heraclitus, as Nietzsche reads his own gestating vision of eternal recurrence into Heraclitus’s shared circumference.

The “stillest hour” of Zarathustra is the awakening to the stillest recurring moment of eternity. But even though it is the same, it is eternally different; the moment stays the same but that does not mean events do not occur within it, continually but without passing away, only moving up and down. This is the gaze of

87 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 268.
the deep wellspring of bottomless timelessness, a ‘serene and terrible noontide abyss.’

Being grounded in the present does not mean being tethered to a spot. There is an infinite openness to time. Awareness of the infinite openness at the ground of time comes about however, within an actual moment of time, in the present time. This infinite openness gives absolute presence to the present. For only the present actually is present, ‘Its presence is beyond doubt.’ What’s more, present within the presence of the present, the now, the eternal now, is that very time of endless beginnings without beginning or end, ‘the beginning and end of that time in itself can be sought within this actual presence itself.’ The presence of the actual moment comes from its possession of both past and future within it, yet because the moment is also its own dwelling place, as a nunc stans, then it is also cut off from the past and future. This is what assures the constancy and eternity of time that does not fly away from itself and create gaps.

It is also important not to see the endless beginnings spoken of as merely a reconfiguration of time as cyclical as opposed to lineal or momentary. It is through the capacity to display all of these features at once, in each continuous moving present, that time manifests the ‘vertical vibrancy’ Stambaugh speaks of. The interpenetration of times different modes of being all in the same moment gives some clue to understanding the quality of presence that time has. Then the resonance of ruins could be understood as the presence of time as it is constituted in the instantaneity of all modes ‘as if midnight were falling at noon.’

**Fragment XII**

Dōgen and *uji*: Heraclitus and flux

The short fascicle, *Uji* (being-time), from Dōgen’s *SHOBÔGENZÔ*, presents what is considered one of his most challenging and original concepts. Within the abundant literary sources that form the wellspring of Zen philosophy the issue of time does not surface with the same saturating prominence as it commands in the

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91 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 289.
93 Ibid., 224. ‘Endless beginnings’ is the ‘infinite finitude’ of eternal recurrence.
95 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 75.
western philosophical canon. When it does emerge from the depths of contemplation it is likely to be in partnership with a complimentary current of thought, one that can ground and lift the spiralling force of such an evanescent abstraction. In other words, time is considered within the context of actual existential experience and not as a separate force acting with indomitable authority in its own exclusive domain, irrespective of the needs and wants of its subjects, as it is understandably easily misconstrued as doing. Dōgen’s uji takes this partnership to such dizzying heights that we are obliged to completely sever the now straining lines of connection between the clodding plod of a diachronic teleology and the soaring possibilities of an “eternal now” lived in ‘discontinuous continuity.’

Also uncharacteristically for Zen literature, Dōgen’s conception of time, or rather being-time for they cannot be thought of separately, holds a central position throughout the Shōbōgenzō and is a key theme that underlies many of the other fascicles. For example, when Dōgen refers to the “self” or “I” in its true suchness, which is the true self, he means it in exactly the same way as he explains being-time. It could be said ‘the words “self” and “I” are synonymous with being-time,’ as do Waddell and Abe in their translations that form The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, which necessarily includes the fascicle Uji. They make particular note of the contextual significance of uji in relation to the whole scheme of ideas presented in the Shōbōgenzō.

The overwhelming import of uji is an immediate and simultaneous mutual interpenetration of being and time. This manifests as a constant transcendent immanence in a momentary yet continuous expression of ‘causal kinship.’ A diurnal interlude of seriatim passage that encompasses all being within time and makes being of all time, that is, it makes time be time, ‘time, just as it is is being, and being is all time.’

Dōgen begins this fascicle with a series of quotations he has apparently assembled together from various sources within which are disclosed the

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96 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 51, nt. 21.
97 Ibid., 49.
98 Nishitani, Religion and Nothingness, 240-1.
99 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 48.
100 It is an admirable custom within the extensive scholarship of Zen philosophy to draw on the huge wealth of literature without need for referencing or keeping in context the stories or quotations being used, for their sole purpose in the first place is to aid elucidation in whatever manner is appropriate to whatever is being elucidated and interpretation is open and certainly not limited to the principle intention of the source.
fathomless depths and ‘glorious radiance’ of times being which is as equally evident in the ‘sixteen-foot golden Buddha’ as ‘Mr. Chang or Mr. Li.’\textsuperscript{101} Time inseparable from being means that without something being in time, time cannot be. Likewise all being is inseparable from time, time allows being to be. The whole of time, every single moment, is full of being, otherwise it would not be. It would not be time, being-time. Time is not just empty passage, it passes through being, it is carried by being through its passage. While each moment contains all of time within it, past and future, each moment is an individual passage of time. Each moment is the ‘constant merging of past and future in the present’ and stands at the crossroads of the eternal now, the ‘immediate present’ as the meeting point of the contradicting trajectories of past and future.\textsuperscript{102} What Dōgen calls “seriatim passage” is the authentic movement of being-time. It is a movement that never leaves the ‘immediate now’ of the present and yet is part of a continuous flow of independent stages of time, thus it forms the passage of a discontinuous continuity. When this is grasped, time can no longer be thought of as simply ‘going and coming.’\textsuperscript{103}

The ideas of time as simply rushing from the past into the future as an historical or organic process or from the future into the past in an incessant unilateral cycle are some of the most tenacious delusions that colour the typical perception of time. In Joan Stambaugh’s reckoning these delusions stand like an impenetrable barrier to an ‘authentic conception of time’ and most particularly to whatever Dōgen may be telling us about anything; ‘what we know time to be absolutely blocks any understanding of Dōgen’s conception of time, or more importantly, of anything else.’\textsuperscript{104} Dōgen himself is all too aware of the difficulties in overcoming such obstinate and determined perceptions, especially when all apparent evidence persuades to the contrary; ‘Since a sentient being’s doubting of the many and various things unknown to him are naturally vague and indefinite, the course his doubtings take will probably not bring them to coincide with this present doubt.’\textsuperscript{105} In other words, it is virtually impossible to doubt something one does not know and it certainly seems counterproductive to doubt something one does know, but this is

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\item \textsuperscript{101} Dōgen, \textit{The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō}, 48, “Mr Chang or Mr Li” are “Tom Dick and Harry” and the “sixteen foot Buddha” is Śākyamuni, the enlightened One.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Dōgen, \textit{The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō}, 50-1, nt. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 50.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Stambaugh, \textit{Nietzsche’s Thought of Eternal Return}, 40 and also see Stambaugh, \textit{Impermanence is Buddha-nature}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Dōgen, \textit{The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō}, 49.
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Third Episode

precisely what is required. As Heraclitus tells us in Fr. D. 18 If he doesn’t expect the unexpected, he will not discover it; for it is difficult to discover and intractable. 106

Again, in the same vein, quoting Wittgenstein, 6.5 If a question can be put at all then it can also be answered. All sense, if we are to make any of the world, is demonstrated to lie quite outside the world. Accordingly questions and problems only form the limits of the world but any solution to the problem must lie outside the world, or more concretely, 6.521 The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. Very thorough, nice and tidy. Heraclitus may find the unknown difficult and intractable, but Wittgenstein officially designates it out of bounds, off limits, an outright impossibility. Well, that is logically speaking. 6.375 As there is only a logical necessity, so there is only a logical impossibility.

The barefaced evidence of times passing in the ruin, combined with the bi-directional generative forces of ruin-time, adds the dimension of space to the time vector and substantialises the “seriatim passage” of uji. Like-wise, time being being-time in the ruin gives a whole new inference to the passage of time as a co-creative immediate presence in the ruin. By immediate I mean, it has not left its mark, but is continuously leaving its mark in a living active sense of being that is at all times in the present mark of time. The sharpness of the past world passed is worn smooth, fuzzy. Outlines smudged, rubbed off, therefore distinctions are erased and worlds collide; ‘if time were to give itself to merely flying past, it would have to leave gaps,’ 107 that is, without the unifying principle of the present, there would be no continuity and therefore “gaps” would appear, lacunae, alzheimeric moments.

Conceding the significant difficulty for a western mind conditioned by dualisms to grasp just how Dōgen’s vivifying yet bamboozling 108 conception of being-time might make its impact on actual life, Loy assists by drawing on the spatial metaphor of a thing in space – as opposed to a being in time. Transferring the more abstract notion of time into a spatial analogy and using something more readily graspable, like a cup, Loy is able to make the notoriously complex and confounding

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106 This translation is taken from T.M. Robinson, Heraclitus: Fragments: A text and translation with a commentary, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987, 19. Cf. Kahn VII He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored.

107 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 51.

108 Is not all that gives of life somewhat bewildering? mysterium tremendum vs vivus perplexus. The vertiginous and complete abandonment of the thus far understood or known, a total letting go, is considered the only method of arrival for an understanding of nondualistic experience. See David Loy, ‘The Mahāyāna Deconstruction of Time,’ Philosophy East and West 36, no. 1 (Jan., 1986):15.
business of *uji* reasonably straightforward. He uses the metaphor of a cup even though it is precisely because of the tendency to treat time spatially, as a container through which we move and where events occur and things exist, that time becomes objectified. This leads to the cauterised unilateral perception which clouds a more open view, although it serves its purpose as a preliminary key to the “gateway” of an immediate present, the “eternal now.” As the fundamental philosophical problem of time is essentially ‘the relation between “things” and “time,”’ through Loy’s explanation of the cup in space, we are able to start to imagine how we could correspondingly be in time as being-time; ‘one way to express this is to say that the cup is not “in” space but itself *is* space: the cup is “what space is doing in that place,” so to speak.’

The individual moments that make up the seriatim passage or discontinuous continuity of times flow do not however accumulate in a haphazard jumble like a basket of slippers at a Moroccan bazaar. They ‘do not overlap or pile up in a row.’ Similarly, in Heraclitus’ thought we find the affirmation of a stable structural order that endures through the continuous flux and change of individual moments of elemental transformation. In fact, the thesis of “Reciprocal Material Flux” that Daniel Graham puts forward as ostensibly the most appropriate reading of Heraclitus’s supposed theory of flux, which is notoriously subject to unending interpretations, has many affinities with Dōgen’s treatment of the flow of time. The so called flux theory of Heraclitus cannot be properly conceived in isolation and to do the *palintropos harmonie* of Heraclitean thought any real justice one must simultaneously consider another theory that dominates Heraclitean scholarship, that of the “Identity of Opposites,” which Graham interprets rather as ‘a more general account of the *unity* of opposites.’ This “general account” is characterised by the same self-determining contradictory identity that is the final enveloping “loop” of Nishida’s logic of the place of nothingness. Nishida comprehends the dynamic flux and stability of Heraclitus logos-bearing structure which he expresses as the deep “unchangeability of the endlessly changing.”

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110 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 52.
In a thorough delve into the historical and ontological dimensions of time Nishitani’s more contemporary configuration of Dōgen’s *uji* gives us another presentation of how the individual moment is positioned in relation to the flow of time. Time is considered primarily from the standpoint of *śūnyatā* which is the axis of emptiness around which his overall thought oscillates. Exhibited once again are the simultaneous possibilities of supposedly contradictory forces, those of change or flux - the flow or movement of time - and constancy in the eternal moment or ‘present instant.’

From a different perspective, in the present instant, the present is at the home-ground of all points of time past and future without ever taking leave of the home-ground of the present. An instant is ever a present *now*; each point of time past and future, when it is constituted as time, can only do so as an instant. In this way, the present, while inexorably the present of time, is nonetheless simultaneous with each and every point of time past and future. The past never ceases to be before the present, and the future after the present; the order of before and after in temporal sequence is never abolished.\footnote{Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 266-7.}

\textit{a. Logos}

Although this account [logos] holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account, men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. But other men are oblivious of what they do awake, just as they are forgetful of what they do asleep.\footnote{Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 29.}

The *logos* is introduced in what is generally agreed to be the opening statement or introduction of what would have been Heraclitus’s book. It is the longest of the fragments and perhaps the most plainly stated, though typically, it is not entirely innocent of ambiguity. In fact, Dilcher for one, goes so far as to say the ‘proem deliberately provokes confusion’\footnote{Mayock, *Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus*, 19. Mayock is quoting from Dilcher.} as a stylistic invocation preparing readers for what is to come. Exactly what Heraclitus is taken to mean by his *logos* is yet

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another point under contestable scrutiny which we will for the present moment give a reasonably wide berth. Whatever the *logos* precisely is, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend. Heraclitus was not to know that the modern language of English would derive its word for logic from the Ancient Greek *logos*, but presuming there is a “logical” connection between the two usages then the incomprehensibility of Heraclitus’s *logos* can perhaps be understood through the lens of Wittgenstein’s proposition of logical impossibility. That is, the *logos* of Heraclitus is understood to be incomprehensible because it lies outside of logic, and quite simply, *cannot* be understood, not, that is, in *logical* terms. Yet, as Heraclitus tells us, the *logos* is there for all to hear, is indeed forever present, omnipresent even.\(^\text{116}\) It is there to be heard and understood even *before* it is spoken. This could be the clearest indication we have that it “lies outside the world” like Wittgenstein’s ‘solution to the riddle of life in space and time.’\(^\text{117}\)

Although Heraclitus’s own “account” (*logos*) is revealed through-out the fragments, and as doxographic history has shown, this too has proven to be its own ill-comprehended riddle, the *logos* to which he refers has implications of greater effect than one individuals account. Implicit in Fr. D. 1 and made explicit in Fr. D. 2 and Fr. D. 17 is that people ignore the evidence of experience and what is shared and common to all (*xynos*) and pursue instead their own private reasoning like soporific zombies: Fr. D. 2 Although the account is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession, and then in Fr. D. 17 Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions.\(^\text{118}\)

The other important theme that is further repeated in the fragments and introduced at the outset is the connection and interchanges between sleep and knowledge and wakefulness and oblivion and vice-versa. I say ‘at the outset’ indicating an agreement with the arrangement of the fragments as they have come to be delivered. The arrangement which has come to be widely accepted is that of Diels and then further revised by Kranz, and subsequently known as the Diels-Kranz, but, as Kahn stated, and to which I have alluded elsewhere, this ordering has asserted its

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\(^\text{116}\) There is some ambiguity in the text of Fr. D. 1, to which is being referred here, of whether it is the logos that holds forever or whether it is men who are forever misunderstanding it. This is a typical form of ambiguity that creates the density of readings the fragments are renowned for.


own perspective over the fragments and results in a reading that has little literary value. Kahn opposed this ordering and has created his own, based on what he perceives to be the strongest thematic links with some semblance of coherency and continuity between each thematic group and the next. Both have however agreed on the placement of the fragment in question at the beginning. There comes a point when no amount of re-arrangement will enhance or further understanding of the content and this is primarily why the Diels arrangement has become standardised. The necessity or possibility of ascertaining the exact form or ordering or purpose of Heraclitus’s book must lose weight after a certain dedicated effort to procure such certainty has failed. More-so when so much meaning is gleaned despite the uncertainty. For would we then have to say that all we have learned from Heraclitus was false once the proper ordering was discovered? This would be the case unless the “proper” ordering was one that served to assure and consolidate what scholars have already insightfully extracted.

There is no reason why knowledge cannot be imparted through error. Indeed there is many a tradition that would say it is only through error that we learn. But, the real magic lies in the mountain vermilion spewed forth in the jewelled palace across the river, for even if it is erroneous learning it takes us across the river and is still part of the new learning of the jewelled palace. Following Graham’s assertion of the “knowledge-how” aspect of the fragments, supported and endorsed by Benitez, it is in the reading of the fragments, the navigation of meanings, without necessarily having to know what they mean, that the real message of Heraclitus is imparted. Therefore the transmission is only made possible with a receiver, or as Kasulis puts it, through participation, a meeting half way. From this perspective the only correct reading is entirely individual, yet probably common to all!

β. Flow, flux and basho

Nishida recalls Heraclitus’s logos-structure of the world in the explication of his conception of basho, which is Nishida’s version of world structure generated by and inclusive of the field of self-consciousness. Even though Nishida ultimately moves away from what he pejoratively calls ‘psychologism,’ the communication between the ideas of Heraclitus and Nishida is transmitted via the development and
awareness of a self-conscious entity that is purportedly at the base of all real experience and any itinerant grasp of reality.

As we recall, Heraclitus’s starting point is ‘I went in search of myself,’ Dōgen’s indefatigable quest for realisation of the Buddha-nature leads him to ‘learn one’s self’ and Nishida disembarks at an ultimate field or basho of absolute nothingness which is the self. The interpenetration of being and time in Dōgen’s uji is also a form of world structure explained through a static-eternal continuous movement outside the receptacle of space. ‘Do not think flowing is like the wind and rain moving from east to west, the entire world is not unchangeable, is not immovable. It flows.’

The dynamic moment of reception that is being-time, is inherent in Nishida’s bi-directional forming of the world, from ‘created to creating’. This is the same continuous dynamic flux of causal relations and balance evidenced in the logos structure of Heraclitus’s cosmic order of steady change. The flow of life is actualised in the individual and we are each part of this cosmic order or logos. This is the bi-directional co-creative force of the world of the absolute. Living as if asleep we do not observe what is right in front of us, that we are flowing with the river as we step and do not step into it. Dōgen beseeches us to ‘Closely examine this flowing; without your complete effort right now nothing would be actualised, nothing would flow.’ The river (life, the universe, logos) flows through us, as we flow through it; neither the river nor the self is unchanging. Both affect change in the other as they are simultaneously effected by the changes.

People’s misunderstanding often comes from the familiarity of the subject. With regards to Time, we are all quite sure we know what it does and where it goes: away. But this is a sleepy observance. Dōgen complains in Uji; ‘People only see time’s coming and going, and do not thoroughly understand that the time-being abides in each moment.’ Likewise, people’s not understanding the logos even though it is ‘common to all,’ may be that it is so close and so common it is imperceptible. Or, it may be a matter, as Heidegger says, of only hearing what we

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120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 79-80.
already understand and that if ‘to think is before all else to listen,’ 122 we need to open to the ‘primal tidings of linguistic nature’ 123 so as to hear more clearly and ‘release ourselves’ unequivocally into the Way/Tao or logos. 124

Nishida does not question the “fact” of flux that is presented by the hints of Heraclitus. Perhaps in heed of Heidegger’s thought on a real thinking experience, the question is eliminated so as to simply ‘let ourselves be told something,’ 125 and therewith begin the cogitative whirrings. So by not questioning, Nishida instead interacts through wonderment, and the “primal tidings” of the Heraclitean hint – the ‘guide-word’ 126 – are washed up upon his open shore of thought to be integrated into his true basho of endlessly changing unchangeability and ‘generation and extinction.’ Noble Heraclitean precepts. What Nishida calls the true basho, which is his ultimate basho of absolute nothingness, is also a locus of absolute flux, ‘the true basho is not only a basho of change but also a basho of generation-and-extinction.’ 127 Bundled into this cradle of supreme godliness where the universal source rocks from life to death in unstoppable kinetic propulsion are the comparative motions kindled in the ruin. Relative to the ultimate basho the ruin is also a locus of generation-and-extinction.

The possibility of such transformation lies in the original concept which must be a ‘universal concept containing opposites’ 128 otherwise the perpetual mutation from one to the other, life to death, beginning and end, could not occur. This fundamental state of flux is found deep in the heart of Nishida’s basho and pays homage to the “unchangeability of the endlessly changing,” which Nishida identifies at the core of the Heraclitean logos-bearing enterprise. Like the logos of Heraclitus, Nishida’s basho is essentially a structure of logic through which we can understand the world and our place in it, how we interrelate with the world and how the world responds to us. This is the form of co-dynamic mutual self-determination that simultaneously reflects the world and is reflected in the world that Nishida elucidates

123 Ibid., 94.
124 Ibid., 96. See full quote ‘Hints hint in many ways. A hint can give its hint so simply and at the same time so fully that we release ourselves in its direction without equivocation.’ The hint he speaks of comes from the guide-word
125 Ibid., 76.
126 For comments on forms of language transmission through face-to-face encounters see Heidegger, On the Way to Language, 93-97.
127 Nishida, ‘Basho’ in Place and Dialectic, 9.
128 Ibid., 57.
in his final work. In light of these two very dynamic world conceptions the ruin reveals itself as a universal locus of co-dynamic self-determination in which the endlessly changing is immortalised through the life giving renovations of decay. There truly is no clear beginning or end to the paradoxical formation of the ruin through the gentle and persistent tide of ruination.

**Fragment XIII**

*Uji in others*

Calvino’s short contemplative meditation *The odd slipper* (from which I appropriated the above basket of jumbled time), illustrates an uncanny experiencing of *uji* through one of Mr Palomar’s many curious encounters with the world. In Dōgen’s conception of time there is no distance spatially nor distance in time between events, even though they are ordered and continuous, thus the time before is present in the time now just as the time of tomorrow is present in today; ‘Does not that time of climbing mountains and crossing rivers swallow up this time of the vermilion tower of the jewel palace? Does it not spew it forth?’

Mr Palomar has bought a mismatched pair of slippers in a moment of distracted ambivalence. He imagines someone else, somewhere, possibly the remote past, in the corresponding slippers to his, also mismatched. He did not let the ‘distance of centuries’ perturb his new found friendship, in fact the solidarity he felt with his limping ‘unknown companion’ was possibly only augmented by the unlikeliness of their connection over such unquantifiable distances in time and space. Does not that time in the remote past, as somebody else, swallow up this time of wondering in the eastern bazaar? Does it not limp it forth? Like Beckett’s ungainly Hackett there is also something suggestive of a Bodhisattva in Mr Palomar, who in this little story shares the jilted gait of Beckett’s more often than not funambulist totterer’s, as they confront the challenges of mobility.

In *Busshō* (Buddha-nature), another fascicle from the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen writes, ‘there has never yet been a time not arrived.’ What he means once again, is

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that there is no other time apart from the time-being and that all being is ‘the immediate manifestation of Buddha-nature.’ The relation between being and time is nondualistic even though it is dependent. From the standpoint of the true self (Buddha-nature) which is being-time, all that we see is this true self ‘set out in array.’ This same self in its true suchness is the whole world ‘we set the self out in array and make that the whole world.’ One of the many consolations of such a liberating and encompassing experience of time as being-time is, ‘even a form [of understanding] that appears to be blundering is being. On a still broader plane, the times before and after one immediately manifests the blunder are both, along with it, dwelling positions of being-time.’ You can’t go wrong. Then again, in Beckett’s account of the ‘double headed’ behemoth Time, dragging the milestone of yesterday, which is ‘irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous’ is not the unfettered foot-free and fancy-loose experience offered up by Dōgen’s uji. Whilst not entirely assimilated, being and time still carry war scars of each other ‘we are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.’

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130 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 67.
131 Dōgen, The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō, 49.
132 Ibid., 53.
People in Ruins

If Heraclitus was to find himself the protagonist of a whimsical venture into the metaphysical significance of his now ruined birthplace I can imagine a very Beckettian character responding in retreat (recalcitrant, reluctant, antipathic – or so the records go). But he is my figurehead whether he likes it or not. Perhaps the association is a little naïve and unsophisticated, borne from the same spirit of idealised nostalgia and superficial mythmaking that nurture the romanticised image of the ruin. So be it. The work of Heraclitus, like the once splendid architecture of Ephesus, is known to us only in its fragmentary remains which we have no way of envisaging in their complete form. That is if there ever was one, for this too is guided by presumption. The poetry of this formal coincidence need not be belittled by the fact that it is highly unlikely for either to have survived in any other condition. The question provoked is one of choice; which aspect of the ruin are we open to encountering? The marbled foothold to ancient history or the momentary yet eternal presence that we are participants in? Along with Heraclitus, Dōgen and Nishida present their cosmic world orders with the human subject as a central and integral part of the whole structural arrangement. The ruin is suggestively postulated as a metaphoric receptacle for these ideas of cosmic order. As a chōra of chaotic array shaped by the same contradictory identity central to the existential act of Nishida, inherent in the overall philosophy of Heraclitus and in the paradoxical logic of Dōgen. Through the ruin we tangibly encounter the metaphysics of Nishida’s self-conscious and self forming absolute present which is characterised by the dynamic form of this contradictory identity. Meditating on all the latent dynamisms of the ruin, and even better, whilst in a ruin, may very well help to cultivate understanding of the inspiring philosophies of these respective thinkers but it is more the reverse that I intend. Thus it would be that by the guiding light of these world perspectives the ruin can be fully appreciated as a living revelation of the bi-directional, non-determined self-determining dynamic of the creative act. Upon this expansive horizon the ruin joins with green mountains’ walking and the sixteen-foot golden Buddha-body in being-time.
Third Episode

Fragment XIV
Heraclitus

Although Diels’s now standardised arrangement for the fragments was deliberately assumed as a neutral structure to avoid imposing any further meaning coloured by personal interpretation, it has by default, in its purely philological approach, stripped the work of any literary structure. What’s more, as Kahn makes clear ‘he thus implied, after all, that the chaotic pattern of his arrangement gave a true picture of Heraclitus’s own composition.’ The aphoristic style of the fragments led Diels to a stylistic comparison with Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* which reflects rather more on Diels’s historical positioning than Heraclitus’ composition. None-the-less, I think the reference to Nietzsche, and particularly the work of *Zarathustra*, rather pertinent and certainly not misguided in its connection. Kahn however, believes ‘the true parallel for an understanding of Heraclitus’s style is…not Nietzsche but his own contemporaries, Pindar and Aeschylus.’ It does of course make much more sense to locate the literary style of Heraclitus within the milieu of its making, and it is in recognition and honour of Heraclitus’s extraordinarily evocative imagery and ingenious and multileveled metaphors that Kahn allies him with these two great writers of antiquity. Yet, at the same time, Kahn’s reasoning can also be applied to the figure of Nietzsche as a more contemporary illustration of the import and impart of these complex and profound thinkers. Without the slightest ripple one could exchange the name of Heraclitus for Nietzsche in the following statement of Kahn’s, in qualification of his referral to Pindar and Aeschylus; ‘Heraclitus is not merely a philosopher but a poet, and one who chose to speak in tones of prophecy.’ What Kahn *is* in agreement with Diels on is that the real starting point of Heraclitus is with Fr. D. 101 I went in search of myself. It is this overarching concern with the place and part of the individual within the greater all-encompassing structure of the *kosmos* that sets him apart from his Ionian compatriots, the true *phusikos*, or natural philosophers.

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134 The numbering system is based on an alphabetic ordering following the names of the authors of the citations.
136 Ibid., 7.
137 Ibid.
Heraclitus both accepts and rejects the pattern of genealogical derivation that is still very evident in sixth-century cosmogony, a pattern which necessitates the notion of a starting point or *archē* characterising the material monism of Ionian physics. In a ‘lofty acceptance-but-also-denial’ of technical cosmologies Heraclitus does not completely fly in the face of his contemporaries but rather redirects the emphasis inwards. In other words he shifts the line of pursuit away from a largely scientific inquiry which aims to explain external phenomena and that is supposedly a radical and progressive advance on mythic thought to the nebulous terrain between the two in which the great drama of life plays out. His focus was primarily on the human condition within society and within a greater cosmic structure which in effect ruled over all. This does not mean he didn’t look outwards to the same elemental phenomena that were helping to shape the new understanding of the world, but his observations were revealing to him the unreachable depths of his soul rather than the first inklings of the weight and movement of gravity.

Following the sensitive and discerning interpretations of Kahn, the Heraclitean enterprise is directed by the understanding that the ‘human condition is inseparable from an insight into the unifying structure of the universe, the total unity within which all opposing principles – including mortality and immortality – are reconciled.’ The *logos*, everliving fire, the unity of opposites, the divine One, these are all part of the scaffolding for understanding not only the nature of the cosmic structure but also the universal principles that coincide in ‘the pattern of human life and the pattern of cosmic order.’

With demonstrative consistency, the form of Heraclitus’s discourse exhibits its own instructive and “unifying structure.” As a unifying structure the meaning is determined in accord with it, and furthermore, it simultaneously acts in unison with the greater universal structure of the *logos* of which it speaks, by using *logos* to speak of it. The dynamic equilibrium between opposites along with the measured constancy of change that helps create the dynamism between universals and particulars, form the “unifying structure of the universe” that Heraclitus represents and participates in. This co-creative expression that at once describes and *is*, coincides with Nishida’s articulation of the structure of reality as a ‘self-determination’ that has at its base ‘this transformative structure of the identity of

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139 Ibid., 22.
contradiction.’\(^{140}\) C.J. Emlyn-Jones is another Heraclitean scholar who attests to the demonstrable consistency between the thought or idea itself and the form or mode of its expression in Heraclitus’s writings; ‘there was no fundamental difference between the meaning of his doctrine and the order in the real world.’\(^ {141}\)

The historical temporal world, propagated by Nishida as the contradictory identity of self and absolute in a continuous process of self-determination recalls the ever changing and continuously generative cosmic world order of Heraclitus. Kahn’s summary testament to the salient suppositions and features of the Heraclitean kosmos describe a self-generating force that must also have at its base the “contradictory self-identity” and “discontinuous continuity” that characterises Nishida’s historical real world.\(^ {142}\) Kahn writes; ‘Insofar as the kosmos is made, it is self-made; insofar as it is organised, it is self-organised; insofar as it is generated, it is identical with its own eternal source, everliving fire.’\(^ {143}\)

It is generally agreed that the first extant philosophical use of the term kosmos is with Heraclitus in Fr. D. 30 The ordering [kosmos], the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures going out. Within this densely paradoxical fragment burns the contentious doctrines of flux, yet flux within an ordered and stable world, material monism (fire posited as Heraclitus’s archē in continuance with his Milesian predecessors) and issues of cosmogony and ecpyrosis – world conflagration. It also has further implications and resonance with the logos as it occurs in other fragments; as logos is also a kind of world-order for Heraclitus – indeed perhaps the ultimate. Without becoming embroiled in the heated debate surrounding fire as a primordial and originative substance, nor in the same flames of controversy engulfing the supposed doctrine of ecpyrosis I will remain instead with the initial spark of this preamble, the “cosmic fire” above.\(^ {144}\) It should be safe to surmise that there is a clear identity between fire and kosmos, even if it is not exactly clear what it is.

\(^{140}\) Nishida, Last Writings, 60.
\(^{143}\) Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 134.
\(^{144}\) Apart from the discussion of these two issues hardly being relevant here, neither are they, according to Kahn ‘decisive for the understanding of Heraclitus.’ Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 135.
Kirk presents what he considers one of the most persuasive arguments for the fragment supported by Zeller, Burnet and Cherniss, and to which I would like to add my tentative voice, in which ‘the ever-living fire is simply a symbol for the κόσμος.’ The word kosmos in early literature can have the sense of “adornment” or “ornament,” derived from the fuller meaning of “good order,” or “arrangement.” These have a primarily military or political sense as in a ‘disciplined array’ or ‘behaviour showing obedience to command’ none of which conjure the other worldly dimensions of unexpected constellations that the modern epithet “cosmic” has come to intimate. Though incidentally, it is reflected in the naming of a Belgian electronic computer logistic system used at the SA container terminals, “COSMOS.”

But the new philosophical rendering of the word kosmos which conjoins the technical idea of a world-order with the symbolic associations of the world described as fire, (or a fire, as Kirk scrupulously specifies ‘the indefinite article is, I think, required in a correct translation’) gives very particular insight into how Heraclitus perceives the nature of order in the world. It is an order governed by unceasing cyclic change meted out in balanced measures that ensures a stable and eternally unified structure whilst undergoing continual transformation. This may seem contradictory if fathomed from an either/or perspective – a perspective that gathered momentum with Aristotelian logic and consequently greatly influenced many historical interpretations of Heraclitus via Theophrastus, leading to, for example the theory of ecpyrosis and dubious cosmogonical assertions.

The alternative perspective is a logic of both/and. To be rightly appreciated or understood, the hidden meanings, double entendre and paradoxical riddling nature of the fragments need to be read through the lens of this both/and logic. If not, then in defiance of Heraclitus’s own generously provided guidance to understanding the logos, his entire discourse may very well end up sounding like the ‘symptom of some mental derangement.’ As a force of both creation and destruction, fire is the...

146 Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, 312, nt. 120.
147 Kirk, Heraclitus: The Cosmic fragments, 317.
148 See Kirk for comments on Aristotle’s possible misinterpretations on the theory of ecpyrosis in Heraclitus. Ibid., 319-324.
149 Fr. D. 93 The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign.
perfect medium through which to express this logic, fire is indeed ‘the very element of paradox.’\textsuperscript{151}

The smoky tendrils of his extinguished yet everlasting flame creep across the Ephesian city walls that must be defended like divine law,\textsuperscript{152} and out even beyond the “land beyond” of Hyperborea, and drift their way into the Far East.\textsuperscript{153} It is relatively recently recognised that philosophical speculation did not independently arise in isolation in all the separate regions of the world, but that a surprisingly significant amount of information was disseminated through various means throughout otherwise distinct and seemingly remote cultures and lands. Peter Kingsley is one such prominent voice, re-writing the annals (or annuls) of history apropos Apollo and the Orient,\textsuperscript{154} both of which happen to be of relevance to Heraclitus (the Orient and Apollo). I do not mean to imply that either the smoke nor idea of Heraclitus’s cosmic fire reached the Orient to be interpreted by ‘some obliging multilingual Magus’ who also spoke “flame” but rather, as Kahn proposes ‘we have an example of thinkers very remote from one another in time and place who are sufficiently akin in turn of mind or speculative temperament to give expression to similar thoughts in similar language.’\textsuperscript{155} Both on stylistic grounds and philosophical standpoints\textsuperscript{156} Heraclitus and the Orient do display a somewhat startling kinship.

In a description of the poetic language of the fragments, Emlyn-Jones reveals the features of a style not too remote from the kōan and literature of what has come to be known as Zen and closer to the time of Heraclitus, the mystical Taoist writings of Chuang Tzu.\textsuperscript{157} He enumerates the qualities that distinguish him from the “‘normal” prose style’ of the Presocratics as ‘an elliptical mode of utterance, a deliberate and careful use of rhythmic and phonetic patterns and a preference for

\textsuperscript{151} Kahn, \textit{The Art and Thought of Heraclitus}, 138.
\textsuperscript{152} See Fr. D. 114 Speaking with understanding they must hold fast to what is shared by all, as a city holds to its law, and even more firmly. For all human laws are nourished by a divine one. It prevails as it will and suffices for all and is more than enough. Also Fr. D. 44 The people must fight for the law as for their city wall. See Mayock, \textit{Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus}, for further discussion of significance of law in the logos of Heraclitus.
\textsuperscript{153} As it was legitimately known from the particular historical perspective of archaic and classical Greece, now however, after Said, this would be an intolerable Eurocentric orientalism.
\textsuperscript{154} See Kingsley, \textit{In the Dark Places of Wisdom} and Kingsley, \textit{A Story Waiting to Pierce You}.
\textsuperscript{155} Kahn, \textit{The Art and Thought of Heraclitus}, 299.
\textsuperscript{156} Although “standpoint” as a term is somewhat anachronistic in relation to the nascent origins of speculative thought.
\textsuperscript{157} The unity of opposites commonly lends Heraclitus to a compatible reading with Chuang Tzu.
concrete images rather than logical explanations,’ and draws particular attention to the ‘paradoxical form of words.’  

This form of paradoxical logic has a striking resemblance to the dialectical method of Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250) and the subsequent Madhyamaka school of thought which espouses a middle-way between emptiness and illusion. Could Heraclitus be the torch bearer for this very path, that if we could but understand the *logos* of which he speaks we would follow to the far shore of nirvāṇa or to the eternal void of *śūnyatā* and home-ground of absolute nothingness? But before we embark on such a journey with our new found guide, archaic poet extraordinaire, let us loiter a little longer, like frogs around a pond, on the fringes of the Mediterranean. The mythopoeic antecedents of the Presocratics were not immediately overthrown by the scientific revolution of Miletus and the Olympians were still very much part of the psychology and belief systems of the sixth-century. Where answers were not forthcoming in the burgeoning philosophies of the *phusikos* there was still Zeus and Apollo to attend to doubts and blame for confounding anomaly. Just as ‘how strange, almost unintelligible, would be the dogmatic rejection of cosmos-genesis by an archaic thinker’\(^\text{159}\) so too would it be quite peculiar for the same thinker to ignore the associated mythologies. Here, betwixt the entry into a rational scientific revolution and the exit from mythopoeic cosmologies, Heraclitus inserts his “riddling dictums.”

It is the predecessor of Heraclitus, Thales - the earliest Greek physicist - who is generally recognised as the emblematic bridging figure between these radical shifts in enquiry, but I think Heraclitus not only maintains the bridge but he extends it into hitherto unknown territories. Fr. D. 32 provides some insight into the shimmering dominions of Heraclitus’s elusive projections and through its construction hints at the type of bridge he provides - rather more of a floating pontoon than a direct fly-over.

Fr. D. 32 The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.

Kahn considers this ‘unusually dense and puzzling’ which is quite an indictment considering the *usual* puzzling density ascribed to the fragments. Here we


seem to have Zeus the divine ruler of the universe being named as the One, the wise and the only, yet uncommitted to where he stands with that. The richness and diversity of potential readings cannot really be appreciation without grasping what Kahn terms the ‘linguistic density’ and ‘resonance’ of the fragments. By ‘resonance’ he means the inter-relationship of the fragments connected through the ‘echo’ of words and images as they appear throughout. ‘Linguistic density’ is the wealth of sense or meaning invested in a single word or phrase. These two devices formally complement and support each-other in the very same way they are operative in reading the texts themselves, a didactic consistency Heraclitus would no doubt approve of. 160 On a second approach to Fr. D. 32 with these linguistic devices in mind the explicit antimony of the statement can be further understood as a complex part of the mysterious and conflicting whole that the overall project of Heraclitus endeavours to articulate.

Starting with the naming of ‘Zeus,’ which most basically, at least superficially, invites and maintains passage to the foundational cosmologies supporting the new gang plank to a rationalist regime. However, it is not in acquiescent compliance to the Hesiodic Theogony that Heraclitus presents the thunderous and life giving God. He has used the older and more poetic genitive form Zēnos rather than the more standard nomitave form of Dios, with an ambiguous placement of ‘only’ or ‘alone’ (mounon), inverting the meaning substantially depending on which clause it is attached to: hence it could either be ‘the only thing to be called by the name of Zeus’ or ‘to be called only by the name of Zeus’ / ‘by the name “Zeus” alone.’ 161 Whilst the genitive form may evoke the traditional conception of a supreme god the use of the impersonal neuter article ‘one’ (hen) contests to a radical de-anthropomorphism quite unparalleled at the time. This is even further emphasised by the negation of the wise one being willingly identified with Zeus. 162

Similarly the first phrase, following Kirk, can ‘conceivably mean any of five different things: (i) “one thing, the only wise”; (ii) “one thing alone, the wise”; (iii) “the one wise thing alone”; (iv) “the wise is one thing only”…; (v) “the only wise

161 Ibid., 269.
162 See commentary on Fragment CXVIII, Ibid., 266-271.
thing is one.”  

Ultimately Kirk and Kahn concur that wisdom must here be understood in an absolute sense in its connection with a divine source, that there really is only one wise thing, or rather wise one, whether or not it is Zeus, the *Logos*, or some other incomprehensible and unnameable force that “steers all.” It is suggested in fact that Heraclitus’s created the precedent for the One of Plotinus. In his two-volume history of philosophy Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) groups Heraclitus and Plotinus together, amongst others, for their communality of vision and it is conceivable (though not probable) that the Plotinian system would not have reached the beatific unity with the One, had Plotinus not been heir to the paradoxical logic of Heraclitean philosophy that is inclusive and expansive in its ability to inhabit both sides of the bridge; ‘Thus the world is a place of transition, situated at once in light and darkness. It is beautiful and divine, because it originates in the One.’

Fr. D. 50 It is wise, listening not to me but to the report, to agree that all things are one.

**Fragment XV**

The scattered array: a convergence in Dōgen and Heraclitus

The scattered residuum, disordered and incoherent, that makes up the landscape of a ruin, inverts the cosmogonic teleology of Chaos in a de-generative return to origins. The composite shambling tabulation of rock and clod, weed and the odd utterly magnificent cornice, that forms the peculiar dynamic life of a ruin is the historical world ‘set out in array.’ In Dōgen’s *uji* the true self or the self in its real “suchness” is none other than being-time. This self in turn, is inseparable from the world and thus as we apprehend the world from the standpoint of this self we are in effect seeing ourselves set out in array; ‘We set the self out in array and make that the whole world.’ The image of the self “set out in array” as the world, and the world set out in array as an image of the self finds playful form in the ruin. There is also a compelling coincidence between the first philosophical rendering of the

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164 Nāgārjuna, Lao-Tzu, Anaximander and Parmenides.
166 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 49.
ancient Greek *kosmos* by Heraclitus and Dōgen’s seeing of the world as our “self out in array.”

Used in a philosophical sense with Heraclitus in Fr. D. 30, *kosmos* extends its earlier literary usage as “arrangement,” which alone has obvious connotations with “array” (keeping in mind these are both translations) into a technical sense of world-order. The world, like Dōgen’s, is out in array. But even more compelling in the context of its resonance with *ujι* is the implication in Heraclitus’s text that the order is ‘self-made or self-grown,’\(^{167}\) as is stated ‘no god nor man has made [the *kosmos*], but it ever was and is and will be’ and that the order is inseparable from the passage of time which is marked by the symbolic life of (a) fire ‘kindled in measures and in measures going out.’ Dōgen describes a simultaneous arising of the mind and the time of that mind, which is to say that the mind cannot be separate from time and because the whole world resides in each being-time, the whole world arises with the mind of one being-time. There is an order within the simultaneous arousal of world and self which means ‘these things do not get in each other’s way’ and there is no overlapping of times. Displayed in the seeming dis-array of the ruin there is a similar arrangement of simultaneous arousals of being and time. However anarchic the dis-assemblage of foliate, dentils and colonnades may be, there presides over the chaos an uncanny sense of order, repose and creative synergy.

**Fragment XVI**

Nishida

Nishida’s search for a logical system that could express all knowledge and experience of reality culminated in the logic of *basho*, a logic with an ultimate standpoint of absolute nothingness. His own process of refining and distilling demonstrates the internal principles that determine the same workings within the logic of *basho*. In his first published work, *An Inquiry into the Good*\(^{168}\) each thought generates the next, which is a perfectly natural procedure, even expected. Nishida however, seemed to do so with such veracity and fluidity that often the sentences appear disconnected and even unfinished, before the next thought begins. Reflecting


\(^{168}\) Which has as little to do with ethics as *Art and Morality*, published 12 years later, has to do with aesthetics, which is to say that they both do have a little to do with their titular topics.
on Nishida’s lecture strategy Nishitani recalls, ‘It was as if all sorts of ideas inside him were jostling against one another and rushing to the exit at the same time. One sentence might not even be completed before another began.’\(^{169}\) It is not a lineal progression as we might take a system of logic to be - especially one that references an Aristotelian system based on subjects and predicates which Nishida’s does - and this is part of what Nishida’s own process articulates.

His entire philosophy can be seen to build on the original idea of ‘pure experience’ that is developed in *An inquiry into the Good*, which is directly influenced by the thinking of James.\(^{170}\) As Nishida himself says of this first work ‘I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality.’\(^{171}\) The enduring enquiry was not into “pure experience” as such, although it was a grounding root stem for an ever expanding inflorescence of ideas, but more the soul, so to speak, of reality. No small task. A task that necessarily involved actual concrete individual experience or ‘knowledge by direct acquaintance’ to be more than a mere abstract and sterile conceptualization.\(^{172}\) This he obtained through the dedicated practice of *zazen* and on the authority of Robert Wargo ‘He did achieve enlightenment and he did philosophize.’\(^{173}\) Even his final standpoint of absolute nothingness articulated through the logic of *basho* is ‘a complex system always in flux and under revision.’\(^{174}\) The constant revision and consequent developments of his ideas accounted for both the aliveness and integrity of Nishida’s philosophy. Nishida was intent on creating a system that encompassed itself, so that all tendencies of objectification were sublimated, ’to neutralize the observer,’\(^{175}\) and to avoid the delusional ‘dogmatism of the reified objective self.’\(^{176}\)

The philosophical problems he confronts are akin to those Wittgenstein most precisely delineates in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, namely that we are some-how logically, that is thinkingly, confined to the world of our thinking, the

\(^{169}\) Nishitani in James Heisig, *The Philosophers of Nothingness*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 34. Possibly part of the reason why I am attracted to him.

\(^{170}\) Whose essays on radical empiricism were published a few years earlier in 1904.


\(^{173}\) Ibid., 89.


\(^{175}\) Ibid.

\(^{176}\) Nishida, *Last Writings*, 90.
parameters set up by the system of our thinking, and that whatever lies outside that cannot logically or even illogically be spoken of. But Nishida is determined to break through the apophatic code of mystical ineffability and in his own ‘leap into “dazzling obscurity”’ is able to concede the point of his predecessors, to whom he is much obliged, and then “implace” the point of his predecessors, into the circumference-less “loop” of his ultimate basho. Most philosophical systems are unable to demonstrate their own consistency without contradicting themselves. This was Gōdel’s discovery in the gnarly (or as many would contend: the divine) world of mathematical logic, and this “incompleteness” is precisely what Nishida’s logic of basho attempts to resolve. According to Wargo, Nishida is able to avoid the shortcomings and “defects” of systems that ‘purport to be all-encompassing’ by ‘rejecting the ultimacy of the subject-object dichotomy.’

Cameron Freeman positions Nishida’s logic within a post-metaphysics framework that is founded on a paradoxical formula which he calls a “structure of the Real,” a structure of ‘bi-polar reversals.’ The paradoxical form of reality, Freeman’s “structure of the Real” is conspicuously represented through the hypostatic union in the person of Jesus. The experience of this paradoxical structure and any attempt to explain it is notoriously plagued with such semantic inadequacies that most efforts are thwarted, rendered illogical and generally abandoned. Or, alternatively, and this is a popular preference, the route is detoured. New constructions of reality are erected that saturate and block out the perturbing opalescence of illogical mystery and ambiguity, and instead we ‘invent secondary conceptions in order to neutralize their suggestions and to make our actual experience again seem rationally possible.’

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178 Wargo, The Logic of Nothingness; A Study of Nishida Kitarō, 113. It should also be noted that these problems only accompany processes and theories of knowing, not for example in ‘a theory that deals with all material bodies, all of space-time, and so on.’ Ibid., 111.


180 Ibid., 78.

suggests has occurred in the early development of church doctrine, and the ‘revolutionary language’ of paradox articulated through the parables of Jesus has been ‘buried and forgotten beneath the ossified theological dogma that was erected in the historical unfolding of the Christian Church.’

Accordingly, the nigh impossible task of explaining the experience of the paradoxical “structure of the Real” may on the other hand, be demonstrated or alluded to, for example, through parable. Freeman’s precise mission in Post-Metaphysics and the Paradoxical Teachings of Jesus: The Structure of the Real is to dis-inter the “revolutionary language” of Jesus’s parables from “the ossified theological dogma” that has been constructed like a tomb around it. What Freeman acknowledges in Nishida’s logic of contradictory identity is a method by which to do this, ‘Nishida’s great insight is that there is nevertheless a system of philosophic understanding that can be truer than another because it points beyond itself to its ground or origin, which is experienced immediately or directly, and can be articulated conceptually in ways which are more faithful to the immediacy of the pure experience itself.’

Or, as Uehara Mayuko puts it, ‘He hoped to disprove the impossibility of reconciling Zen’s immediate grasp of reality in the truest sense with a philosophy of self-reflection by way of objectification.’ He does this through ‘a logic of unobjectifiable reality’ that inverts Aristotle’s ‘the subject that cannot become predicate’ into ‘the predicate that cannot become subject.’

In his final essay The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview Nishida confronts our ‘bottomlessly deluded depths’ as self-conscious entities, and formulates a doctrine of “contradictory identity” that encompasses both subject and predicate in a unified non-objectifiable ‘simultaneous presence and absence of the self and the absolute.’ This takes place on the field of absolute nothingness (to appropriate Nishitani’s idiom, itself an extension of Nishida’s concept of the ultimate “locus” or “place” of nothingness) where all dualities are overcome in a dynamic co-expressive form of creative expression.

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182 Freeman, Post-Metaphysics and the Paradoxical Teachings of Jesus, 9.
183 Ibid., 100.
185 Masao Abe in the introduction to Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, xxiii.
186 Nishida Last Writings, 86.
187 Ibid., 87.
He explains the world as a self-transforming matrix structured on a dynamic of contradictory identity. Where there is contradiction there is life. These are the life forces made explicit in the bi-directional transformation of the ruin. The rise and fall, the immediate now of past and future, or as Heraclitus puts it Fr. D. 60 The way up and down is one and the same. In the words of Nishida, so perfectly suited for the crumbling growth of the ruin, ‘it is this dynamic world, having the form of self-affirmation through self-negation, that transforms itself by expressing itself within itself.’

**a. Basho: ruins as a receptacle of basho**

Nishida acknowledges Plato’s notion from the *Timaeus* of the “receptacle place” or “chōra” as the container of ideas, but is careful to distinguish *basho* from what he sees as the fundamental limitations of the notion conditioned by an overriding objectification. By appropriating the term ‘receptacle’ he is able to give an immediate philosophical grounding and perhaps an historical context that is an unusual reference point in Japan at the time of Nishida. He takes the concept further by extending the contained to the container within the Idea as well, ‘We cannot determine *basho* by means of so-called logical form. Instead it is *basho* that establishes logical form.’ His *basho* is about concrete experience. It is the basis of his explanation of reality that accounts for the one and many. *Basho* is a field or “platz” (as he apparently referred to it in his notes) where the dynamic interpenetration of the epistemological subject and the object of cognition mutually and interdependently co-exist. This arrangement takes direction from the Buddhist conception of *śūnyatā* which is represented as ‘a field ten thousand miles wide, where there is not an inch of grass growing.’

Nishida’s multidimensional matrix of *basho* starts with the physical world and builds through the biological to arrive ultimately in its final ontological looping to the human-historical-existential world. For Nishida, the ultimate *basho*, the “place of nothingness” is only made possible through the ‘biconditional structure of mutual

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188 Nishida, *Last Writings*, 73.
189 Nishida, ‘Basho’ in *Place and Dialectic*, 5.
190 Ibid., 59, nt. 5
191 Suzuki, ‘The Buddhist Conception of Reality,’ 98.
negation and affirmation’\textsuperscript{192} evident in the self-conscious act at the level of the human-historical. This ultimate \textit{basho}, a ‘universal that envelops and determines all individuals,’\textsuperscript{193} is not to be thought of as just a place or “receptacle” but is also self-determining within itself. It is in this way that \textit{basho} overcomes the objectification latent within Plato’s \textit{chōra}. Another very important aspect that Nishida critiques as a failing in the \textit{chōra} is the lack of ‘positivity operative in its formlessness.’\textsuperscript{194}

In his essay \textit{Logic and Life}, written some ten years after his first articulations of the logic of \textit{basho}, Nishida applies the logical structure of \textit{basho} to the outer world of historical reality. The basic structure of \textit{basho} is a dialectical unfolding of a self-determining world. He applies this structure to the outer world where the interaction between humans and nature working ‘upon one another and upon things’\textsuperscript{195} is more readily evident. Nishida attempts to overcome the objectification of logic by making the \textit{basho} structuring self-inclusive:

\begin{quote}
Historical reality is not something that we can just conceive by means of the logic of objectification. The active self is unable to enter into the world of objects postulated by the logic of objectification. Therefore the world of historical reality must be inclusive of the self at work.\textsuperscript{196}
\end{quote}

Nishida’s aim with the logic of \textit{basho} is to ‘explain the structure of experience’ and explain nothingness in context with more “ordinary concepts.”\textsuperscript{197} As we have said the notion of \textit{basho} owes something to Plato’s “receptacle,” and it is also an engagement with Aristotle’s enquiries into originative substance. He moves away from the influence of German Idealism prominent in Japan at the time and more towards a kind of realism which started with his interest in the ‘pure experience’ of James and Wundt.

\textsuperscript{192} David Dilworth, ‘Nishida’s Critique of the Religious Consciousness,’ the introduction to Nishida, \textit{Last Writings}, 18.
\textsuperscript{193} Nishida quoted in Wargo, \textit{The Logic of Nothingness; A Study of Nishida Kitarō}, 187.
\textsuperscript{194} Nishida, ‘Basho’ in \textit{Place and Dialectic}, 2.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{197} Wargo, \textit{The Logic of Nothingness; A Study of Nishida Kitarō}, 91.
The existence of the ruin is predicated on non-existence. The ruin is a poignant reminder and image of the interconnectedness of the ‘going and coming’ of time’s passage and of the cycle of justice measured out ‘in accordance with some fated necessity,’ and it’s undeniable and ‘immediately perceived presence’ bespeaks of far more than just a cycle of decay and renewal.

When the ruin is viewed askance from the usual framework of history and archaeology, it lends itself most overtly to philosophical ruminations on impermanence, flux and cyclic change. But perhaps in equal measure, to metaphysical notions of becoming. These ideas are evident in the sociologist Georg Simmel’s (1858-1918) short essay “The Ruin” from which it seems Florence Hetzler heavily drew to form her own concept of ruin-time. Undoubtedly the idea of the ruin attracts a certain quixotic nostalgia and has a special flair for inspiring the prosaic orator to verse. Although I don’t intend to take up rhyme, I confess I am not immune to the poetic persuasions that the conticent ruin somewhat ironically evokes. Simmel, Hetzler, and most notably, Robert Ginsberg in *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, all display advanced symptoms of the nostalgia distinctive to the ruin, a kind of utopic mourning.

Aesthetically Simmel reads the ruin as a ‘unity of external image and internal effect’ where antagonistic and contradictory forces are resolved in ‘a profound peace, which, like a holy charmed circle, surrounds the ruin.’ He would not experience with Wiles the same profound proximity to the past in the muted visage of Bernadette. For Simmel ‘A painting from which particles of paint have fallen off,'
[or] a statue with mutilated limbs[^202] does not constitute the artistic unity embodied in the ruin through the growth and life of nature amidst the dying form of the constructed edifice.

Normally we are privy to a one directional flow, that from life to death, from beginning to end, but the simultaneous arousal of being and time in ruin-time gives us an image, in the ruin, of life-*sive*-death and death-*sive*-life. Nishitani describes the emergence of the ‘true suchness’ of a form as ‘the point at which the orientation to life and the orientation to death intersect. Everything can be seen as a kind of “double exposure” of life and death, of being and nihility.’[^203] The “double exposure” or “emergence” in the form of the ruin of life and death makes it an outstanding form of “true suchness.” By outstanding I mean it is visible, and stands out in its true form. Both life and death become simultaneously visible thus a mode of being termed life-*sive*-death, death-*sive*-life.[^204]

There is a romantic candour with the blush of naivety in Hetzler’s enthusiastic veneration of the ruin. She heralds the ruin as ‘a new category of being.’[^205] Her exalting appreciations of this newly declared state are not in themselves complicated by the probing of existential pontifications, but yet contain within them the seeds of whose flowers reveal their more exquisite and subtle renderings further afield. Indeed the coalescence of time with being in Hetzler’s ruin-time immediately summons the unique perspective of Dōgen and his concept of *uji*.

Ruin-time, as Hetzler explains it, is a unifying natural force acting in opposing directions that is in fact immanent in the ruin. In Taoist and Confucian thought there is a principle of effortless or natural action called *wu-wei*. *Wu-wei* denotes ‘action that . . . accords in every particular with the normative order of the cosmos’ and is also suggested as a ‘phenomenological state’ that is an embodiment of the Way (Tao) rather than observable action.[^206] It is in this way that the great sage rules, as it states in the Tao-Te Ching:

[^204]: Ibid.
[^205]: Hetzler, ‘Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins,’ 52.
Being and non-being produce each other;  
Difficult and easy complete each other;  
Long and short contrast each other;  
High and low distinguish each other;  
Sound and voice harmonise with each other;  
Front and back follow each other.  
Therefore the sage manages affairs without action (wu-wei)  
And spreads doctrines without words.  
All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. 

Sometimes wu-wei is thought of as non-action, but this does not mean doing nothing, it means non premeditated action in accordance with a natural flow or order of things. This natural action of wu-wei definitively resonates with the ruin-time of Hetzler. Both evolve from a ‘spontaneous accord with the patterns of nature’ and in the graceful flow of times unfolding without forceful interference the ruin and the rule is acted out. Indeed if the process of ruination is forced in any way it becomes one of destruction and the sight of ruins becomes one of dereliction and death, with no equilibrium between generation and extinction. The unforced flow of action in time is utterly essential to the life of the ruin.

The contradictory forces of ruin-time create a paradoxical movement of simultaneous ruination and unification. If the ‘maturation process’ of the ruin is affected through precipitant events outside the uninfluenced causality of nature in the uninterrupted flow of time then it is not the creation of ruin-time and the ruin as such is simply a site of destruction. It is ruin time that gives the ruin its being.

Hetzler writes, ‘each being has its own time,’ however she does not mean this at all in the sense that Dōgen says being is time, but rather more standardly that each little packet of star dust has a shelf life, a pending expiration date: that there is an allotted stretch of time given to each being as it marks its path across the skies, or maybe that each being beats to their own time-ing perhaps. Or, gleaning our own meaning from what might be superficially evident in the statement, it could be that each individual expression of being is a self-determining co-expression of a

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209 Hetzler, ‘Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins,’ 51.
210 Ibid., 52.
universal absolute, of which each is accorded their own time and unique positioning. As with Heraclitus, in the measuring out of this own time, cosmic order is maintained. Only through this strife is justice maintained. Either way there is a grasping of the “skin, flesh, bones or marrow” of a much larger existential awareness embedded in the cracks and fallen temples of history.
Third Stasimon

Enter Chorus. They set off across stage. What a gait. Stiffness of the lower limbs, as if nature had denied them knees, extraordinary splaying of the feet to right and left of the line of march. The trunk, on the contrary, as if by the effect of a compensatory mechanism, as flabby as an old ragbag, tossing wildly to the unpredictable jolts of the pelvis.¹

[Interlocuters]

THRIB
THREAP
A PIECE OF ROCK IN ALLEGORY
RECEPTIONIST
CHORUS

[Scene]

Amongst drifting cloud wisps Thrib and Threap perch on a craggy precipice near the summit of a magnificent floating peak, somewhere near-by is a secluded alpine retreat, as of yet undiscovered or undisclosed. The voice of Receptionist emerges from the abyss below, often distorted with echo. The chorus loiter mid-way up the mountain on a very small, unexpected and welcome alpine-steppe.

THRIB: Oh yes. (Pause). I should have want to go over there (waves non-committedly in a generalised far off direction).
THREAP: Yes. (Assured, knowing, inordinately calm).
THRIB: (Pause) Yes. (Mimics the assurance of Threap) Probably (pause) mmm (less sure).

Silence

RECEPTIONIST: (shouting out, slightly distracted) What?

Thrib: (with a start) Oh! (Looks around, down, around, at Threap, takes a small mirror out of his top pocket and looks at himself, with particular attention to the nose). Well! (Puts the mirror back, looks straight out again-not down). Is it…? Shall we? (Looks again at Threap. Threap leans forward and peers down into the abyss. After an indeterminate time of contemplation Threap leaps off the crag, without ceremony).

CHORUS: Mountains respond to the temple bell in the moonlight*

A PIECE OF ROCK IN ALLEGORY: …and that.

In conclusively, unknowing is evoked as a state, and this state is then posed as a method. Out of this expressive state of method of unknowing, it is intimated that the creative act transpires. It is participatory and relational, a conversation, a bidirectional mutual exchange between it is and it is not. A parry with paradox, a collaboration with the coincidence of opposites, a fugitive penetration into memories oblivion. A state of method is the being of doing.

As to the characteristics, customs and habitat of this state of method, a definitive field guide has not been provided. This entire document is a guide to rather than on. Certain routes are suggested, and certain signs are offered. A risky word to bring in at the tail end of the trail, but nevertheless it may be said that instinct, unqualified and unreasonable, is the true guide. Outrageous. Problematic? Risky. This is an individual guide which must be met with on one’s own terms. Those terms may respond to a shared logos and therefore be comprehensible in some way (although Heraclitus did not witness such harmony within the all) and form part of a “human universal” like that which Kahn identifies in the philosophical resonances between disparate cultures, geographies and histories.

Unknowing is a creative method, a state out of which the creative act is made possible. It doesn’t have any specs, it doesn’t have anything, it is because it is not. There can be no about (ah the apocryphal about) of a state of unknowing, it can only be (the epiphanic is), and that is what this has attempted to demonstrate, attempted to be, or perhaps better said, daimonstrate.

The question remains. Does the creative gesture start where knowing ends? What is the creative gesture? There are no direct routes, not to this question, but in answer to it, there are no direct routes because pointed determined routes are not creative, they block. That does not mean there is no destination, or indeed that there must not be some form of destination in mind to head towards, or else departure would be futile, unimaginable, unthought of (ansking – departure is the question, destination the answer) BUT, there are all those unexpected stop overs.
Fr. D. 18 He who does not expect will not find out the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored.⁴

Is it a form of thoughtless thinking? Not ill considered thoughtlessness, but like a form of formlessness, an act which comes from the void where body and mind have been thrown off and the “true suchness” of a thing, a moment, an act, a being, is encountered. Perhaps the ultimate creative gesture is being, and as being is nothing without time then we must do. The product of being is incessant doing, the ineluctable activities that being compels, even, as Nishitani states, if that doing is doing nothing at all. Doing nothing is still a creative gesture. To be in time is to do something, even if that something is nothing. How does unknowing govern the act of being-time and ineluctable doing? With free reign, in fact, the bridle is quite forgotten.


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