Armistice Day: The Unthinkable at Work in Violence, World War I, and the Culture of the Early Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT

Armistice Day: The Unthinkable at Work in Violence, World War I, and the Culture of the Early Twentieth Century

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This thesis is about the unthinkable. It argues that the transcendence manifests the same impulse that irrupts into life as violence and the urge for violence. Specifically, violence is the return of the unthinkable when it is repressed, and the “unthinkable” character of any violent or traumatic act is evidence for this. I begin with a phenomenological analysis of the experience of embodiment, showing that psychological well-being depends on a full and complete articulation of motor impulses in perception, one that leaves space for the felt touch of the other’s motricity—their touch, their gaze, etc.—to enter in. This is a delimitation of the motor, one that frees one from the immanence of one’s own motricity to reveal the influence and the transcendence of the other. This freedom, this delimitation, is the unthinkable. As a part of this phenomenological study, I analyze both the accounts of those who perform self-harm and the manifestos of school shooters, showing that in any impulse toward violence there is a sense of drowning in one’s own undelimited motricity, one’s own infinity, and a longing for the touch of the other that only felt finitude can provide. Violence is a shortcut toward this finitude.

The remainder and the bulk of this thesis is a comparative analysis of various art pieces and cultural artifacts from the years during and immediately around World War I. The claim here is that World War I itself can be conceived as a collective eruption of this impulse for the unfelt touch of the other, for finitude and that which transcends the finite. I analyze artists like Wassily Kandinsky and Giacomo Balla as a part of this process. I show that their work depicts a flight from Cartesian space toward a framework where spatialities can encounter and penetrate each other without existing in a grand, overarching, undelimited spatial schema. I look at Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which is an attempt to delimit language in the same way that those artists delimited space. And I deeply analyze passages from C. G. Jung’s *Liber Novus*, his attempt to probe the depths of the psyche through recorded fantasy, alongside those from a lecture by the spiritual teacher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner, to show that a deep awareness of the need for finitude and encounter shows itself there. I conclude with a postlude showing that the Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg’s exegesis of the biblical flood depicts a situation where transcendence has been repressed.

Keywords: war, violence, phenomenology, art history, philosophy
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Introduction

This is a thesis about the unthinkable. But here there is already an ambiguity. By unthinkable I could mean, literally, that I cannot think it, or I could mean things that are so terrible and awful that I refuse to think them or are incapable of thinking them. The violent and the transcendent are both beyond thought. This thesis, in brief, will assert that these two are one. The violent is a kind of transcendence, a kind of irruption, something as unthinkable as God is.

To get some preliminary idea of this, consider the trauma victim and how they are often unable to speak about their traumatic experiences. In conversations with them, there will be gaps, ellipses, pregnant pauses that announce a kind of elephant in the room. This silence is very loud. It is a center of gravity that distorts emotional space-time. Or, for instance, consider the ritualistic quality of self-harm. Those who cut themselves do it not exactly as self-punishment but as something less predicable, less rational. Finally, consider events like 9/11, school shootings or even the Holocaust, when those who discuss them typically do not know what to say or how to say it. There is no comfort here, no consolation, at least not one that can be thought.

The violent is unthinkable, transcendent, irruptive, ecstatic. The “unthinkable” is, here, what transcends thought, but more precisely, we could also say that it is that which conditions thought. Here, again, what I mean by the unthinkable is the act of giving boundary to the things we think. For unless we delimit what we can think from what we cannot think, unless we delimit the different things we can think from each other, unless the gap between thinkable things lets distinct, discrete, individuated thoughts emerge, we cannot think at all. For the interval between thoughts, the silences between them, these gaps, are what divide thoughts from each other, what gives them edges, what therefore makes them what they are.
But it is tempting to forget that this silence, the unthinkable backdrop to thought, is necessary. When we do this, when we try to think what cannot be thought, to speak what cannot be spoken, the unthinkable, the unsayable, returns in another way. Namely, it will stray into the things we can think, and it returns as violence. What conditioned thought, what lived behind the camera of thinking, will wander in front of it, into the world, as something awful, terrible, horrifying. The image of a discovered suicide note, the gas chambers of Treblinka, the smell of gunpowder and blood, any and every horrifying, traumatic memory, all these bespeak things that seem thinkable, should be thinkable, but are not. I cannot think them, try as I might. For unless there are silences between thoughts, unless we honor the gaps between them, unless we admit that there are things we cannot and should not know, this silence, this gap, will return as gaps upon the body, as scars, and as the silence haunting the one who saw them rip open.

Implicit here is the assumption that the repressed can return. Here, transcendence is repressed, and it returns as violence. For violence is a kind of transcendence. Both distinguish. Violence, of course, severs limb from limb, puts two in a family against three, even dissociates my consciousness, but the transcendent, too, distinguishes what can be known from what cannot. But transcendence is more than just religious here: it is also social. You transcend me; I transcend you. The way I look into your eyes, the way your gaze invades mine, the way I can touch you, implies a discrete difference here, one that can be bridged, but nevertheless one that is there. Violence can then be seen as a neurotic version of sociality, the return of repressed sociality, but here, again, both depend on the unspeakable in one way or another.

The unspeakable, the unthinkable, lives in these gaps between things we think, things we know, things we speak of. These gaps, like the space between my eyes and yours, like the discrete difference of my skin and yours when we touch, like the silences between thoughts,
distinguish and individuate. This is transcendence; this is otherness; this is difference. If we forget this transcendence, if we try to speak what cannot be spoken, to think what cannot be thought, to incorporate the undeniably different into a single whole, then this whole will be wounded, split in two, and within the things I try to speak there will be words I am unable to speak because of the terror in them. The known is surrounded by the unknowable. Abandoned in one way, it returns in another.

This thesis, then, will try to show how this is the case. I will begin with a rather lengthy phenomenological analysis of the experience of embodiment, of how it relies on aspects of experience that, paradoxically, are invisible, unseen, that cannot be thought. This section will rely heavily on a word I use in a somewhat idiosyncratic way: motricity. I borrow the word motricity from the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, where it means something like the experience of muscular movement, but here, I mean a very specific amalgamation of movement, value, and predication. Implicit in this equation is the assumption that I only move toward what means something to me, and that it is precisely those things that I will predicate as meaningful. Moreover, motricity has an essential temporal component: it does not exist in a moment but between moments, across moments.

At this point, I should also define two other terms very carefully: proprioception and predication itself. Here, by proprioception, I do not mean anything precisely scientific, anatomical, or medical. Instead, here, proprioception is what it is etymologically: self-perception, perception of self. More specifically, it is the experience where motricity experiences itself in perception, in experience. I will explain all this soon. By predication, moreover, I mean the attribution of significance to something perceived, the activity of seeing something as significant for action. This is not logical or linguistic predication as it is normally conceived.
Finally, I should also define another term precisely: transcendence. When I use this term, I mean something very similar to difference or otherness. Therefore, at least initially, no mystical or religious connotations are implied. The mystical and religious connotations of transcendence will return, and, I argue, are necessary to any experience of difference or otherness. For instance, when I look into your eyes and see that you are other than me and yet nevertheless penetrate me in a way I cannot explain, this is a religious experience that is still everyday. However, the various authors I will explore in the rest of the thesis use concepts related to transcendence in their own idiosyncratic ways.

For instance, Kandinsky and Rudolf Steiner would conceive of this transcendent factor, this unspeakable quality that irrupts into what can be thought, as a literal transcendent realm of being, a realm filled with beings. Wittgenstein, however, would not think this, but instead would see the transcendent in a much more technical sense, namely, as that which cannot be said but instead shows itself. Jung’s notion of the transcendent would likewise situate itself somewhere between these two poles: one that allows for a realm of being beyond the ken of physicality and consciousness (namely, a collective unconscious), but one that can nevertheless be studied.

As such, remainder of the thesis will consist in a study of history and culture as a case study for what the phenomenological section had made clear in its own way. If it is true that the transcendent, when repressed, returns as violence, we should notice a precise correlation between violence and the attempt to speak what cannot be spoken. And we do: World War I and the years immediately preceding it show an urge toward blood, a lust for the sword and the gun, an impulse to strike out, to stab, to attack. However, this time period also indicates a twofold cultural movement: on the one hand, an attempt to precisely elucidate, once and for all, in clear logic, what had remained implicit, and on the other hand, a full-fledged dive into the unseen.
Wittgenstein exemplifies this love for mystery in philosophy. Moreover, in the realm of painting, the Italian futurist productions, the early abstraction of Wassily Kandinsky, and other cultural works indicate this descent into unspeakable things. I will analyze all these figures over the course of this thesis. They are particularly apt examples of an attempt to (paradoxically) speak the unspeakable, think the unthinkable, in a way that I argue the war would also try to do. I will conclude this main section with an analysis of Carl Jung’s *Liber Novus* or *Red Book*, together with an analysis of a lecture by the spiritual teacher Rudolf Steiner from the time period, as cultural artifacts that describe World War I somewhat in the way I do. And finally, I will end with a brief postlude about the correspondences with themes explored here in the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.
1. A Phenomenology of Motricity

1.1 Motricity as Value

We should first note that value is always implicit in motricity. When I pick up a cup, I do it for a reason. I empty the garbage can for another reason. I open the door for yet another. I want to do all these things. The cup, the bin, and the lawn are valuable to me: they light up, appear to me as something significant, important, different from others. This cup becomes what Martin Heidegger would call “ready-to-hand”: it becomes a tool, a means of accomplishing my projects, in a way that it would not be if it were merely an object of bare, sensory attention. In his own words:

The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is--as equipment...No matter how sharply we just look at the ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it as its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character.

(Heidegger 98)

The hammer, the cup, the lawn, do not appear to me as a concatenation of sensory phenomena: they are always already something available to action, something useful for my projects, something relevant for my arms and my legs, not just my head. This relevance, the “sight” that Heidegger talks about as implicit in readiness-to-hand is what I call motricity. Motricity is, in
this sense, the intelligence of movement, the way it “sees” things, the way my limbs comprehend the world.

1.2. Motricity as Predication

And yet this all depends on movement in the obvious sense as well. When I drink a glass of water, I move my arm, as I do when I mow the lawn, open the door, or pick up the hammer. Muscles are pulled; I move. Moreover, a careful analysis of movement will show that it is always preferential. A movement toward one thing is also a movement away from something else. I pick up the cup and leave behind my lap; I mow the lawn instead of wiping the windows. Implicit in movement, in motricity, then, is value. I value what I move toward, and my movement manifests that value. As such, the world as it gives itself to me in the intelligence of my limbs, in motricity, is laden with value, and this value comes because of my capacity for movement. Movement intends the world, or rather, my capacity for movement does so. Certain parts of the world appear to me as important because I can move toward or because of them.

As such, we can say that, in a special sense of the word that I outlined above, motricity is an act of predication. Motricity gives value to things in the world, and therefore makes them, in a sense, objects to a subject. The “subject” here is not the philosophical subject but something more like the grammatical subject: that which acts, that which uses a verb to intend an object, that which predicates. Implicit in the grammatical subject is the capacity to predicate, and as such, we could say, the capacity for valuing and therefore for movement.

1.3. Modes of Motricity

Moreover, motricity can operate in different ways. I can value what you do not; you can value what I do not. These accomplish different vectors of movement, different modes of movement, different modes of motricity. I move fluidly, and you move with jerks and starts.
These are so many motor projects, so many trajectories of the muscles through space, that arrange themselves in concatenations of means and purpose. I move my hand, clasp my fingers, to pick up the cup. I move my legs, pull back the cord, to mow the lawn. Movements stack on top of each other, but which movements are used indicate a mode, a logic, of motricity that varies from person to person. I may mow the lawn with a spring in my step; you may do it sluggishly. Motricity differs slightly in each case.

But it is worth reiterating, on this point, the firm distinction that exists between the act of valuing and the thing valued, between motricity and the thing it intends. I push forward a heavy piece of furniture, and yet the heavy piece of furniture is not the act of moving it. Neither is my arm itself the act of moving, say, the sofa. The arm--as a mass of flesh and bone--is a thing, not an activity. Motricity, as the act of movement, as the act of valuing, is not a thing at all. It predicates things, situates things, in the same way that a verb situates and predicates both the subject and the object.

1.4. Motricity as Invisible

As such, to be strictly accurate, motricity is invisible. Certainly I see my arms and legs when they move, see the way she walks with a bouncing gait, see the flourishing gestures he makes, but I do not see motricity itself. For if motricity, the act of movement and of valuing, as an activity, not a thing, is neither the arms nor the sofa, what exactly would I see? Perception cannot follow what my arm does. My arm, by the grace of its own movement, what leads over in and through time, moves itself out of itself and toward itself, extends through space. This is an active creation of the conditions for sight, an active causality, but perception can only ever witness the effects of this movement, this transcendence. It lags behind, does not see any active-self-transcendence but only that which is created by that act.
This observation is at the heart of Zeno’s paradoxes. If an arrow moves a distance, it must first move half that distance, and then half of that, and then half of that, and so on ad infinitum, which means that it must cross an infinite number of spaces, which, Zeno maintains, is impossible. (Aristotle 439) Whatever else this paradox implies, it suggests that movement cannot reduce itself to instants, that processes which unfold through time--time itself--cannot be spatialized in a way that makes us able comprehend spatially, in a way that it can be perceived spatially. Indeed, instead of being situated in space, time situates space.

For instance, these observations are implicit in the work of the philosopher Henri Bergson, as exemplified in his two main points from a lecture called The Perception of Change, that, first, “We shall think of all change, all movement, as being absolutely indivisible,” (Bergson 118) and second, that “there are changes, but there are underneath the change no things which change: change has no need of a support. There are movements, but there is no inert or invariable object which moves: movement does not imply a mobile” (122). Time, for Bergson, is not something “tacked on” to space; movement is not of something immobile, of something with a definite spatial position, but exists in itself as something that precedes any given location. Motricity, likewise, is not perceptible as such. I can see that I have moved, see the results of my movement, but motricity itself, as something temporal, as something that transcends and therefore unites spaces, lies nowhere in any of those spaces.

1.5. Proprioception as a Synchronization Between Motricity and Perception

Implicit in this conclusion is a dichotomy between the body as it moves and the body as I see it. My body is both something that I move with, move as, something I pick up the cup with, something I use to mow the lawn, but it is also something I see, with my hands in front of me, my feet below me. This is, in another way, the body as invisible and temporal (in the way
outlined just above) and visible and spatial. Certainly, these two are rarely disentangled, perhaps never completely, but nevertheless I believe it is a useful distinction to make, one that makes intelligible integral aspects of human life.

I, for instance, as a person with autism, tend to take my disorder as an opportunity to investigate the basic structures of human cognition and experience when pushed to their limits, since these structures are often clearer when exaggerated or distorted. I in no way claim that my experience speaks for all autistic persons, for all autists, but instead that they function as a radicalization of human life in their own idiosyncratic way. There could be other such radicalizations. For instance, when I move throughout my day, I often experience a feeling of not having grasped my body in the right way. I move my hands and my legs, but that movement always feels a bit disoriented and arbitrary. Where my arm is in space is often somewhat of a mystery until I see it, at which point, I can adjust my arm, but even then I often move too much or too little. Often, moreover, I seem surprised when I look in mirror, no matter how many times I do so. I cannot grasp on a deep level that the thing I see is the thing I feel like. For what it is worth, many other autists I know have reported similar experiences.

Whatever else these examples mean, they speak of a lack of synchronization between my body as I move it and my body as I see it. I can move my arms without a problem, can move them effortlessly forward, back, or in whichever direction, but how quickly and how far I move them is often unconscious. When I see those movements, I am surprised, just as surprised as I am in front of a mirror. There is a deep feeling that this disjunction should not occur, that this desynchronization should not take place, and both this and the fact that I need to explain this phenomenon to the reader is evidence that it is a distortion of the normal mode. Both aspects are there--the moving body and the seen body--but what is missing is the synchronization between
them. It is this synchronization that I call proprioception. Proprioception is, in this sense, the realization that the body I move with and as is also the body I see.

1.6. The Symbolic Nature of This Proprioception

This does not mean, of course, that I see my movement. I have explained already why this is the case. If I could do this, my disorientation would be impossible as I describe it, since there would be no disjunction to remedy. These two principles must be, in principle if often not in fact, separate. But they are, nevertheless, not unrelated. Instead, I move my arms in a certain way and see that my arms have moved in that way, I pick up the cup and see that I have picked up the cup. And so on. This alliance between active movement and passive perception can, I argue, best be understood as a kind of interpretation or reading. Motricity inscribes traces of itself in the perceptible world, signifies itself there, and I must interpret this signification to bring about the union of the principle the “reads” these signs and the one that “wrote” them. This interpretation is proprioception: the union of motricity, which “writes,” and perception, which “reads.”

This signification is not, however, used in the same way that someone would use it to speak of the connection between signifier and a signified. That connection is between two things that are, in principle, already alike: i.e. the word “bike” and the bike over there, the word “red” and the bike's color, etc. In each case, there is an assumption that the word, in some sense, supervenes on and is inessential to the thing it describes. However, this cannot be said of this signification of motricity in perception. Motricity is not something “there” so that I can measure and align it with what expresses it. It is not “there” before it expresses itself; it exists in and through that expression. We cannot speak of both as if they were visible in a single line of sight, as it were. The one is only visible in, as, and through the other.
Crucially, therefore, we cannot speak of accuracy when it comes to the expression of motricity in perception. The expression of motricity has no “referent” it can correspond to. A system of representation that relies on accuracy implies two signs both situated in a common spatiotemporality, but in the signification of motricity in perception, motricity does not technically create images of itself (for there is no “itself”; it is not a thing) but, instead, produces effects. As such, the perceptible traces motricity leaves in its wake—the footprints I leave in the sand, the bookshelf I use to store the books I read, the smile I make to show my happiness—do not describe a mode of motricity but, instead, imply it.

I suggest instead that this implication is necessarily symbolic. The smile is a symbol of happiness: everything about it is “open” and “up.” These are both positive words—as in “feeling up,” and “open your eyes”—as this gesture is necessarily positive. The bookshelf is a container for valuable things, in principle (and in form) not very different from a closet, a birdcage, or a wardrobe. It gives a space for things that, though they are valuable, are not used perpetually and take up space when they are not being used. The bookshelf, the wardrobe, and the birdcage are built around the spatiotemporality of the book, the set of clothes, and the bird, respectively. Each is structured around a motor activity. As such, a whole calculus of motor symbols could be assembled here, but that is not my task in this thesis.

1.7. On Self-Harm as a Proprioceptive Activity

Let me give another example of this principle. Those who engage in self-harm—people who “cut” or who purposely injure themselves in another way—generally do not do so for suicidal reasons. Instead, it is used to feel alive, to feel strong emotion, and, crucially, to feel internal pain externally. Take this poem by a nineteen-year-old Australian cutter as cited in the opening pages of the book *A Bright Red Scream* as an example:
She pays such a terrible
Price for her sin and
At last the outside
Matches the in
Justice (Strong 1)

Here, “sin” is conceived of as an imbalance between inside and outside, an “injustice,” an “injustice,” one that can only be expiated by something corresponding to it on the outside, something that is as painful physically as the “sin” is internally. Another poem also cited in the book, this time by a sixteen-year-old cutter named Melanie, echoes this point:

‘This’ pain I can see it but I can’t feel it

It haunts me

When I cut myself I can see where the pain
is coming from and watch it heal
And I can easily care for it
‘This’ pain doesn’t have a specific place

It moves around and creeps into strange places (5)

“This” pain is the pain that seethes under the surface. Notice how she feels it move around and creep into strange places. It is movement, but indefinite, disoriented, undefined. This is motricity, a mode of movement that, unseen, unsituated, in no specific place, is anywhere and everywhere in potential. In a sense, one drowns in it. To cut is to give a definite place for the mode of movement without a place, to signify what signifies in me, to propriocept. Indeed, cutting is a mode of proprioception in this sense. It is a way I can feel (i.e. perceive) what I am, how I am.
This insight has not gone unnoticed by certain psychologists. Sigmund Freud, for example, noticed something like this when he mentioned in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* something that will also be relevant for the later part of this essay, about World War I:

In the case of the ordinary traumatic neuroses two characteristic emerge prominently: first, that the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright; and secondly, that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule against the development of a neurosis. (Freud 6)

Here, Freud observes that “war neurosis,” cases of trauma resulting from the shock of the war, does not occur to the degree that a physical wound or injury occurred together with the shock. The wound relieves inner psychological tension in much the same way that the wound that the cutter inflicts on herself does. The wound, in this sense, serves as a signification of the “inner” wound, but also, therefore, a discharge of it. We arrive at the idea that to signify pain is to relieve that pain, to complete a mode of motricity.

And indeed, that is a common experience. I cry, and my sadness lessens. I find something funny, and a tension builds up in me that laughter relieves. I feel an urge to perform my favorite tic or “stim,” and the accomplishment of it relieves that urge. If I feel the tension emerging in me of something that “moves around and creeps into strange places,” the act of signifying it through a muscular movement locates that tension, embodies it, and therefore relieves it.

We therefore arrive at a conception of motricity in which it has a fundamental link with its signification in a perceptible space. Motricity discharges itself through perceptual signification. Moreover, perceptual signification can, in a sense, invoke the mode of motricity it corresponds to. A smile can signify happiness, or it can summon happiness that was not there before. These two parts are intertwined, and if they occur apart, if motricity does not
“correspond” to perception, if I do not recognize it there and thereby link the two, motricity will do everything it can to come to my attention through perception.

As such, we can now look at cutting in a new context. The cutter is often dissociated, whether through trauma or some other way, and this dissociation can be read as a feeling of my body not being my own, a lack of proprioception. In other words, the dissociated life of the cutter is one where motricity, though forming itself into shapes through my arms and legs, is not recognized there, is not synchronized with my sight. There is a block, so to speak, between the subject and the predicate. The cut, then, opens this block. The cut helps me feel that what I see of my body is something I can move, that what moves in my body I can see. In short, it reconciles and bridges inside and outside. It propriocepts.

1.8. Unpropriocepted Motricity and the Need for Encounter

However, it is also worth noting that when I am flooded by the motor significance of an event that I cannot propriocept, that cannot come to consciousness, this experience is intrinsically antisocial. For the motor mode that I embody, the bounce to my gait, my smile, my furrowed brow, are the perceptible and therefore public incarnation of my interior life--my happiness, my anger, etc. It is motricity’s full perceptual declaration, its signification in the public sphere, and it is visible not just to me but also to others. However, if motricity has not been propriocepted, if it seethes everywhere and anywhere but nowhere in particular, if “it moves around and creeps into strange places,” then this motricity will indeed signify itself, will indeed find a perceptual form, but it will cloud my vision of others and prevent me from seeing them clearly. I will see more of myself, more of my own baggage, in the other person than I see the other person herself. The other person becomes a way of processing my own unresolved trauma rather than a being to appreciate in his own right. I see her as a mother; I see him as the
enemy I make certain parts of myself. This is projection, and projection is, here, read as the way unfelt motricity signifies itself in perception and tries to synchronize with itself there.

This kind of encounter is not really encounter at all; it is mutual selfishness, mutual baggage-relieving, which is not without utility, but which is also not social at all. Genuine encounter is not one where I see the other in terms of my motricity, where I let my motricity spatialize her. Instead, it is where I let her motricity spatialize itself, where each gesture, each emotion, discloses itself on its own terms. In genuine encounter, each person spatializes herself in every other person, and each person reads the other in terms of his own spatiality.

This shows itself in the experience of eye contact. The eyes communicate my disposition toward the world--they orient themselves toward an object of attention, do so in a certain way, and when that object of attention is me, when I am the one you are looking at, when, specifically, my eyes and their attention are your eyes’ object of attention--then your spatiality, the way you predicate the world as valuable, works its way into my world. I feel myself become invaded, seen into, and to a degree, this experience is pleasant. I become an object to a subject. Likewise, when I look at you in the eyes, your attention becomes predicated in my attention; I see into, “invade” you. This mutual, reciprocal predication can and should achieve a kind of balance, where I predicate you and allow myself to be predicated by you, and neither preponderates.

This encounter depends on a discrete gap between my spatiality and yours, a gap that, crucially, cannot be spatialized or predicated. In eye contact, the “between” is not precisely a between: there are only two pairs of eyes and the two spatialities that correspond to them. There is no “objective” space that both are situated in. There is no “third,” no bird’s eye view. For if there were, this bird’s eye view would merely be a spatiality, a mode of predication, a mode of motricity, of attention, that has not delimited itself, that therefore refuses encounter. But because
each spatiality, each mode of predication and attention, has also allowed itself to be predicated (I have allowed my eyes to be seen by yours), this backdrop disappears, and there is a moment of encounter, where my mode of signification (the pattern of my eyes’ movements and the direction of their attention) becomes signified by your eyes and vice versa.

1.9. Violence

And this is where the thesis proper returns. The gap between predicative modes—the encounter between eyes, between my skin and yours, etc.—is that which lets each mode individuate itself, allows each one to declare itself, gives it room to do so. This gap is that room, is that space, and if it does not exist, I drown in my own motricity or the motricity of others. As such, the gap, as the revelation, the individuation, the “surfacing” of motricity, is the bearer of all novelty, of all sociality, of all encounter. Nothing new can occur if I drown in the old, if the old has yet to disclose itself in me and release its hold on me. But this is a human need: we long for eye-contact, for touch, for encounter. As such, when we lack this need, we seek for shortcuts to fulfill it. Violence is one such shortcut.

Violence is the reciprocal surfaced of predicative modes that have become inextricably tangled in each other. It is a surfaced, a declaration, of a revelation that has not been seen. It stabs to as to free itself; it cuts itself out of the titan’s belly. Violence, as a phenomenon of anger, of assertion, is always a phenomenon of boundaries. Something has been mistreated, subsumed, consumed, drowned, and it longs to surface. To cut, to stab, to shoot, is to surface like this in a concrete, visceral, symbolic way.

It is no accident, for instance, that the non-political school shooter is typically isolated. For instance, the manifesto of Chris Harper-Mercer, the one who committed the rampage at Umpqua Community College in 2015, describes how
“I have always been the most hated person in the world. Ever since I arrived in this world, I have been under siege from it. […] My whole life has been one lonely enterprise. One loss after another. And here I am, 26, [sic] with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin” (Harper-Mercer)

Notice the oppositional language here; he is “under siege” from the world, “hated” by it. This is language of disconnection: his life is “one lonely enterprise,” and he seems to measure the worth of his life by connections: by friendships and romantic relationships, or rather, by the lack of them. There is no encounter, no intimacy, but only confrontation. In another manifesto, this one by Elliot Rodger, the perpetrator of the 2014 Santa Barbara shooting, he says the following:

I'm 22 years old and I'm still a virgin. I've never even kissed a girl. I've been through college for two and a half years, more than that actually, and I'm still a virgin. It has been very torturous. College is the time when everyone experiences those things such as sex and fun and pleasure. Within those years, I've had to rot in loneliness. It's not fair. You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime, because ... I don't know what you don't see in me. I'm the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman. (Rodger)

Here, again, it is disconnection that frustrates the shooter. He sees himself as someone inherently other from “everyone,” when “everyone” has sex, has fun, has pleasure. He “rots in loneliness,” as if connection were some kind of revivifying force.

In these cases, the shooter is drowning in himself, in the mode of motricity, of being, that organizes his world and yet which he cannot surface from. This results both in a feeling of disconnection and one of grandiosity. In truth, they imply each other. A grandiose self-image
results from a spatiality that has not let itself be spatialized and, as such, one that has not welcomed in the other. Grandiosity shows itself a great deal in these documents. The Virginia Tech shooter Seung Hoi Cho compared himself to Jesus Christ, for instance (Cho). Elliot Rodger, in the above excerpt, calls himself “the supreme gentleman.”

A strange, yet common, variant on this sense of grandiosity are images of infinity or unboundedness. Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine shooters, wrote the following poem in his journal:

Existence..... what a strange word. He, set out by determination & curiosity, knows no existence, knows nothing relevant to himself. The petty destinations of others & everything on this world, in this world, he knows the answers to. Yet they have no purpose to him. He seeks knowledge of the unthinkable, of the indefinable [sic], of the unknown. He explores the everything...using his mind, the most powerful tool known to him. Not a physical barrier blocking the limits of exploration, time thru thought thru dimensions.... the everything is his realm. Yet, the more he thinks, hoping to find answers to his questions, the more come up. Amazingly, the petty things mean much to him at this time, how he wants to be normal, not this transceiver of the everything. Then, occurring [sic] to him, the answer. How everything is connected yet separate [sic]. By experiencing the petty others' actions, reactions, emotions, doings, [scribble] and thoughts, he gets a mental picture of what, in his mind, is a cycle. Existence is a great hall, life is one of the [scribble] rooms, death is passing thru the doors, & the ever-existant [sic] compulsion of everything is the curiosity to keep moving down the hall, thru the doors, exploring rooms, down this never-ending hall. Questions make answers, answers conceive questions, and at long last he is content. (Klebold)
Implicit throughout this piece is a sense of infinity, of circularity, of feedback loops that cancel each other out and proceed forever. “Not a physical barrier blocking the limits of exploration….the everything is his realm.” He is a “transceiver of the everything.” He sees that “existence is a great hall….life is passing thru the doors, & the ever-existant [sic] compulsion of everything is the curiosity to keep moving down...this never-ending hall.” Throughout this journal (titled simply “Existences”) are images of this never-ending hall, like two mirrors put in front of each other (Kleblod). Images of infinity also occur in the notebooks of James Holmes, the Aurora theater shooter. The notebook opens with an image of a the number “1” superimposed over an infinity symbol, and on the next page is written “what is equal equal to?,” and that “equal=∞” and under it, that “priceless, unlimited value good” (Holmes).

Here, infinity makes sense. A motricity that has no perceptual delimitation, that drowns in itself, that allows no place for the other, for interruption, is intrinsically circular. They are caught in themselves. They have no awareness of their own edges. There is no sense of otherness, no sense of finitude. For the infinite is intrinsically lonely. It is therefore no accident that the grandiose, the metaphysical, and wretched feelings of loneliness tend to coincide.

The violence that these shooters perpetrate can be read as the way they break through infinity into finitude, the way they surface from themselves, become finite, and encounter the other. The wounds that occur, the blood spilled, become symbols of an impermeable self opening to the outside, of the one and the other intermingling, sharing essence. The shooter, who experienced a world of feelings that were not seen, an overwhelming inner world, makes that world socially manifest through the rampage. Connection happens, though only at the very end, and only through blood and death.
Pathological and horrifying as this is, however, it is an exaggeration of normal modes of human sociality. Eye contact is violent, in a way. When I look into your eyes, I am invading your space with my own, and you invade my space with yours. There is a commingling of some soul essence, a reciprocal piercing, and yet we experience this as pleasurable. This is a delimitation of my own essence, a feeling that I am seen, that I am not merely an endless circle, but an object to someone’s subject, a mere thing, and this is delightful, in a way. I am situated. I know my place.

Eye contact, seen in this way, is a kind of mutual wounding, a way by which the outside can flow into the inside and vice versa. Any kind of touch is a “wounding” in the same way. Insofar as touch occurs, I both touch and am touched: I am both an object and a subject. Touch, therefore, individuates. It gives me edges, gives me “me.”

1.10. The Unthinkable

But in both eye contact and violence, in both the social and the horrifying, there is, again, something unspeakable that makes encounter possible. The gap between my eyes and yours is not something we can see; instead, it is something that lets us see. The gap between my skin and yours is not something we can touch; instead, it is something that lets us touch. Silence, likewise, is necessary for conversation. If there are no gaps between my speech and yours, then one person preponderates and it is not a conversation anymore. This gap, this silence, is unpredictable, untouchable, unseeable, unsayable. And yet it guarantees predication, touch, sight, and speech.

This gap, as that which guarantees these forms of connection, is very important. But it is not always there. In the school shooters mentioned above, they drown in their own self-importance, their own infinity, and yet something is missing: the touch of the other, their gaze invading mine. There is a nourishment missing, a revivifying factor, that leaves them to “rot in loneliness.” That nourishment—the unfelt touch of the other—returns as violence. Violence forces
the experience of encounter, of touch, of opening, through literal openings—wounds. Blood pours out. An intermingling of essence in the public sphere occurs. The “cutters” examined above testify to this in a major way. The “in-justice” comes outside through the cut. What “did not have a specific place” gains one. I become an object in a world full of subjects. I become finite, capable of being seen.

1.11. Intro to Part 2

From my perspective, this longing for encounter is what occurred in the years immediately preceding World War I. I choose this time because it is exemplary, but I could just as well have picked our own. We stand at the threshold of new possibilities, of new motricities, of new affects, that we reject because we have not individuated old once. Shootings and divisive politics represent our attempt to find this novelty, to realize it. If it is not born in love, it will be born in blood.

2. The Unthinkable in the Years Around World War I

2.1. Wassily Kandinsky’s Composition VII

Let’s begin with Kandinsky. A painter in the early twentieth century, Kandinsky’s artistic purpose was to distill the spiritual from the physical, to create an art that does not depend on representation or natural forms but, instead, creates and displays spontaneously. Here, immediately, we notice an attitude that relates to the phenomenology of motricity above. Whereas traditional painting represents—depicts a referent, so to speak—Kandinsky’s abstraction irrupts into the perceptual sphere in the same way that a smile would. The shapes in his works are not copying external forms. They are displays of spiritual-emotional qualities, much more like a gesture than a word that corresponds to some external reality.
When one looks and Kandinsky’s Composition VII, for instance, one sees an assemblage of shapes that are not connected by what looks like any overarching order or spatiality, one that would elide the differences not just of the shapes but of the shapes’ own spaces. Instead, this painting welcomes, embraces difference, not merely of the shapes but of the way the shapes declare themselves, the way these shapes individuate. This is, however, necessary to a work that has abandoned natural forms. To overcome a world where everything is at the beck and call of a single, unilateral space, so to speak, one would have to have the freedom of enlarging and shrinking shapes without regard to what surrounds them. Space would need to be proper to objects, not to some commonality between all objects. It would need to be, so to speak, democratic.

However, as we have seen, a difference between two or more spatialities is therefore also unspeakable. In the same way that my eyes create their own spatiality around themselves--orient and turn their attention to whatever they find interesting--and in the same way two pairs of eyes meeting each other will create a gap that, itself, cannot be seen, this painting implies a gap between its shapes that is not, itself, a shape. This gap, more concretely, would appear as a disjunction between shapes that neither shape seems to appropriate. And this is present in the work, and indeed must be if it is to abandon natural forms. Consider the black wiggly line in the left-center of the painting, for instance. There is a blue shape on its left side that ends abruptly and gives way to another series of shapes that bear no relationship to the blue. These two sides are not continuous; there is no spatial continuity between them. Instead, they are linked by something that is not, itself, proper to any of the shapes involved.

And yet this is present everywhere in the painting. Anytime two shapes border each other, there is the same discontinuity of spatiality. Take the circular shape in the top center of
Figure 1 Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913
painting, for instance, the one with blue circle inside and a white center. The shapes outside bear no relationship to it; they come together only by some kind of mutual agreement, some kind of encounter.

And yet this “mutual agreement” can be broadened to comprise the whole painting. Each shape has come together which each other shape not accidentally, not by virtue of the accidents of a unilateral space, but by a more musical agreement, a harmony. This relationship is not unlike the encounter in touch or eye contact: there, we relate to each other not in a continuous space but by the discontinuous, discrete encounter of sociality. This does not mean we pass each other by but that, instead, we interact by a kind of dance, a kind of spontaneous homeostasis. This can happen between two people, but it also happens between many, as in crowds, concerts, or dances.

Much the same is at work in Composition VII. The work is aesthetically pleasing, gives one the sense of balance, of order, of that homeostasis. For instance, the red violet shape like a right angle in the lower left-hand corner of the work seems to create a set of lines branching out from that angle that circumscribe most of the painting. One can actually see a line of the same color traveling on that same trajectory on the left-hand side of the painting, and there are many lines between shapes that follow other “leg’s” trajectory. Or, for instance, compare the squiggly shape in the very left-hand corner of the painting to those in the very upper-left corner. Or notice how sharp, scratch-like lines only appear in the left-center of the painting, whereas more organic, round shapes preponderate in the right half.

In short, the work seems to be built around the principle of compensation. If one side is more angular, other sides will be less so. If there is a side that contains a noticeable feature, another side will contain one that corresponds to it. This is not, however, a simple symmetry. It
is multivariate, so to speak, depends on many factors. For one, if one side contains a noticeable feature, another side which lacks that feature can correspond to purely by virtue of a spatial preponderance. It is as if the interesting shape “weighs” more, and the other side must be “longer” to achieve equilibrium. One can see this in many places in the painting, including the angular shape tending toward the left balanced by the rounded shape occupying the bulk of the painting toward the right.

Kandinsky himself talked about this compensatory principle in his book *Point and Line to Plane*. In the section titled “Plane,” he speaks of how the “left” and the “above” give a feeling of looseness, whereas the “right” and the “below” give a feeling of condensation and heaviness (Kandinsky 2013 116-120). As such, Kandinsky speaks of ways of using this principle to create “the greatest contrast” and “a mild contrast.” A pair of shapes where one on the left is oriented upwards and one on the right oriented downwards would be “an example of the greatest contrast since the form at the left is directed toward the loosest resistance and the form at the right toward the stiffest,” whereas one where the leftmost one would orient toward the left and the one on the right toward the right would be “an example of a mild contrast because both forms are directed toward milder resistances and their form tension from each other but slightly” (130). In both cases, the aesthetic power comes from contrast: the aesthetic power of the plane’s directionality blends or does not blend with the power of the shapes that are on it.

This contrast implies the aforementioned principle of balance. For Kandinsky, as is evident in Composition VII, shapes should not inhere in a static space, or at least not always. He writes

The properly trained eye must have the ability partly to see the plane, as such, necessary to the work of art and partly to disregard it when it takes on a spatial form. A simple
complex of lines can finally be treated in two ways--either it has become one with the BP
[basic plane] or it lies free in space. The point clawing its way into the plane is also able
to free itself from the plane and to ‘float’ in space.” (130)

The plane is the unilateral spatiality of the work, that in which all the shapes inhere as common.
Kandinsky, here, emphasizes that the shapes in a work can and should free themselves from that
shape. They should “‘float’ in space,” which is to say that the space they happen to lie on is
inessential to their nature, that, in large part, they determine the terms of their own spatiality,
their own appearance.

And yet there are interesting tensions at work in this painting’s balance, interesting
compensations there. The aforementioned complex of lines in the left center of the painting is, I
argue, crucial for understanding the painting a whole. For Composition VII, by and large, is an
organic painting. It has soft shapes, soft colors, rounded edges--that is, except for here. This, the
focal point of the painting, is something angular, jagged, ugly. Something threatens the
painting’s nature, so to speak. Something oppositional, something confrontational. One gets the
sense that something is threatening the unity in the work, that there is a danger afoot, a wound of
some kind, as if something has invaded it. Considering that this painting was done in 1913,
immediately before World War I, I argue that this “something” is that which would also express
itself as the war, the tension in the air, the looming sense of dread.

And indeed we have evidence for this with Composition VII. In Study for Composition
VII, which preceded the work proper, “one can recognize a blue-faced angel blowing a golden
trumpet at the upper right; above the trumpet, a red amorphous shape with three horizontal
strokes symbolizes Elijah’s chariot; in the center, a mountain with a walled city topples over [this
corresponds to my complex of lines]; and at the center left there is a red trumpet” (Dabrowski
Kandinsky evidently connected this work to apocalyptic themes. It is worth noting on this point that the work *Composition VI*, painted in the same year, is associated with the Deluge in a similar way (Dabrowski 13). In 1913, it seems, apocalypse (which means a revelation or an unveiling) was on Kandinsky’s mind.

It is also worth noting, on this point about threats to a social, harmonious homeostasis, that Kandinsky touches on very similar ideas in his 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. In it, he speaks of a “large acute-angled triangle divided horizontally into unequal parts with the narrowest segment uppermost” (Kandinsky 1977 6). This triangle is a representation of the life of the spirit, a revelation, and he writes the triangle moves slowly upwards and forwards, invisibly (6). For Kandinsky, the “life of the spirit” is a dynamic one. It is not static, does not represent an unmoving, hypostatic substrate but one that itself moves, itself has its own intelligence, its own will. It is fundamentally prior, something so close so as to be invisible, and yet something fundamentally new.

We could read this triangle, inflowing into the world, as the “other” that we encounter in sociality, only on a grand scale. It is the motricity of the other, the motricity of the non-self, encounter itself, beckoning. We can therefore reveal it in two ways: by accepting its call, accepting its otherness, and by softening, or by rejecting it, stiffening against it, all the more. The experience is not unlike what one has in massage where one either “lets in” the touch of the masseuse or, bracing against it, leaves more tired and stiff than before. The difference here depends on whether my own motricity has been lived through, has been signified, has been propriocepted. The new calls me to become myself, but if I will commit to not becoming myself, to not propriocepting, I will reject the other as I reject myself. Violence is one of the only answers in this case. When I drown in myself, in the old modes of movement, the old reactions,
my baggage, that have yet to be delimited, the only way for encounter to occur is by a sudden surge upward of these modes, by a sudden jerk, a sudden lashing out. Violence then becomes relieving.

2.2. Attitudes at the Beginning of the War

Consider, in this context, the attitude of soldiers at the beginning of the Great War. Ernst Jünger’s *Storm of Steel* contains invaluable insight for this purpose:

We had come from lecture halls, school desks, and factory workbenches, and over the brief weeks of training, we had bonded together into one large and enthusiastic group. Grown up in an age of security, we shared a yearning for danger, for the experience of the extraordinary. We were enraptured by war. We had set out in a rain of flowers, in a drunken atmosphere of blood and roses. Surely the war had to supply us with what we wanted; the great, the overwhelming, the hallowed experience. We thought of it as manly, as action, as a merry dueling party on flowered, blood-bedewed meadows. ‘No finer death in all the world than..’ Anything to participate, not to have to stay at home!” (Jünger 5)

Obvious here is a lust for violence. They “shared a yearning for danger.” They longed to “experience the extraordinary,” “enraptured by war.” Danger and the extraordinary are equated here, and violence becomes something exotic, death something, paradoxically, full of life. There is a sense throughout this passage that anything was better than home, the “lecture halls, school desks, and factory workbenches.” These places are all “inside,” indoors, none of them outside. There is no encounter here, none of the individuation provided by experience. Implicit there is the feeling that normality is oppressive. There is no excitement, no novelty. Death, violence, and blood provide this novelty.
Notice, moreover, the similarity to accounts of “cutters”. Another passage from *A Bright Red Scream* cites a forty-three-year-old lawyer named Lukas, who says “If you had seen the look on my face when I hit the artery you would know what the expression ‘unholy glee means...the feeling I get when I hit the vein and the blood comes out is better than anything. It’s better than drinking, it’s better than any drug I’ve ever taken, it’s better than sex” (Strong 10). The sense of orgiastic, gleeful pleasure at violence is extant in both accounts. Just as Jünger describes “a yearning for danger,” and moreover, a “hallowed experience,” Lukas describes an “unholy glee.” Religious themes, implicit in both accounts, return again later in Lukas’ testimony: “watching the blood pour out makes me feel clean, purified. It’s almost religious, in a way. It makes me feel like something bad or dirty is leaving with the blood, so the more the blood spilled, the better” (11). The above poem that mentions “a terrible price for her sin” and “in-justice” is another example of this principle. Notice, also, how Jünger mentions the “drunken atmosphere of blood and flowers,” and how Lukas talks about how it’s “better than drinking.” Alcohol “enraptures,” empties one of oneself, but so does violence.

But there are more accounts than just in Jünger’s memoir. For instance, a letter written in March 1912 by Erich von Falkenhayn, shortly before he became Prussian War minister, treats of the possibility of war by saying “For me it will be all right [sic]. I am most tired and extremely bored by this lazy peacetime life” (Afflerbach). Another of his letters, written in August 1914 to the German chancellor Bethmann Hollweg at the outbreak of the war, says that “even if we perish, it will have been wonderful” (Afflerbach).

This excitement was not limited to the continent, however. Winston Churchill, of all people, wrote to his wife on 28 July 1914, saying “Everything tends towards catastrophe and collapse. I am interested, geared up, and happy. It is not horrible to be built like that? The
preparations have a hideous fascination for me. I pray to God to forgive me for such fearful moods of levity.” (Best 51) The philosopher Bertrand Russell, himself a pacifist, also noted unhappily when observing crowds in Trafalgar Square on August 4 that “average men and women were delighted at the prospect of war” (Monk 364).

Clearly, something stirred the “average man and woman” of August 1914. While some historians have noted that the “August Experience” of 1914 has been overplayed in accounts of the time period (Nees), accounts like Russell's and Jünger’s suggest that there was indeed at least a strain of enthusiasm in the war, especially since these two were written by those who (either during the event or after it) viewed that enthusiasm in a negative light. An overview of these enthusiastic responses shows a sense of boredom and stultification before the war, an itch for something new, something exciting. One could also, perhaps, cite merely the title of the 1898 book by Jan Gotlib Bloch entitled Is War Now Impossible? (Bloch) as evidence of the mood for which this enthusiasm was a compensation. This stultification can be read as the sense of “everythingness” that also pervaded the school shooters’ manifestos. There is nothing new, no other. The world is infinite, so nothing new can be added. Violence is a “remedy” for a world that has eliminated everything problematic.

One can also, perhaps, read the event that sparked the war along these lines. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who was assassinated on 28 July 1914, can himself be read as a symbol to the masses of the “old,” the stultification of old regimes, tradition, the boredom of a world in which war had been eliminated. It is interesting that World War I, which began with such a lust for violence, should itself begin with an act of violence, a wound, the flow of blood. More specifically, the assassination of the Archduke can be read as a rebellion against a representation which does not express motricity, against a shell that disjoins inside and outside,
against that disjunction itself. The Archduke, in this sense, does not express the populace, for there is no democracy. One can read the teenage anarchist assassin as a manifestation of this urge to express unlived motricity, something not unlike the cutter’s urge to slice open their own skin. For the cutter, the urge to open the skin is a rebellion against that skin as something that does not express who they feel themselves, a way to conjoin what had been disjoined.

2.3 Futurist Painting and Writing

Another example of the collective urge for violence in these few years can be found in the painting and writing of the Italian futurists. The Futurist Manifesto, for instance, speaks within its first few paragraphs of a movement “right up to the limits of logic” and an “army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs” (Marinetti). It speaks of “drunkards beating their wings against the walls” (Marinetti). These are, from the get-go, images of transcendence and novelty. The new breaks in; there is an other. However, here the transcendence images itself as violence. We must confront, break open, violate. A wound must be created; the walls must be split open. In Marinetti’s words, “nothing equals the splendour of its red sword which strikes for the first time in our millennial darkness,” and “we hunted, like young lions, death with its black fur dappled with pale crosses, who ran before us in the vast violet sky, palpable and living” (Marinetti).

This violence, while frightening, is not a rejection of life, not a nihilism, not a suicidality. It is a passionate acceptance of life, and specifically, a passionate reaching after the unfelt touch of the other, the transcendence of his spatiality into mine, of novelty, of encounter. For Marinetti, violence and the death therefrom is life, is the blood and passion of life. He speaks of death as “tamed,” and how it goes in front of him “at each corner offering [him] his hand nicely”
(Marinetti). Death is, here, an aspect of life. As is arrogance, violence, and assassination. It is the aspect of life that has, itself, been rejected.

Marinetti likewise speaks of “the love of danger”, of wanting to “exalt movements of aggression, feverish sleeplessness, the double march, the perilous leap, the slap and the blow with the fist,” and of “the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible” (Marinetti). “Time and Space died yesterday,” says Marinetti,” and “we are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed” (Marinetti)). For him, violence opens. It transcends and provide something that cannot be given by my map, by the old maps, of “space and time,” which “died yesterday,” but of something defined by its transcendent and transcending character: speed. Speed shatters, kills, and opens. It allows not merely a dead space and time but an actively generative movement of spatialization, a discretely different act of giving perspective, something new, finally.

Giacomo Balla’s work “Abstract Speed + Sound,” painted a few years later between 1913 and 1914, demonstrates this concretely. Upon looking at the painting, one immediately notices a regularity, an order, a logic to it. The red parabola in the upper-left-hand portion of the painting proceeds along a path echoed by the red mass that, likewise, creates a circular hole in the lower-right-hand corner. White accompanies the red seemingly at every point, as does the blue.

And yet the order that one sees is not static by any means. It is utterly, profoundly dynamic. The upper red, as we have seen, is parabolic, launching forward, curling in and out, tense with movement, perpetually reaching, stretching. The red is what initially announces itself to the viewer: it surrounds the painting, declares itself ostentatiously, garishly, making itself concretely distant from the blue and the green.
Figure 2 Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed + Sound*, 1912-1913
Indeed, the blue and the green form themselves into crosses: they pass into themselves, ensure their own existence, remain static, largely undisturbed. Except, of course, for the red that interrupts these blue crosses, but interestingly, in no case do these red lines remain in static cross formations. They penetrate beyond them, form dynamic, continuing zig-zag patterns.

The red, in so many words, longs to step beyond itself. It seems as if it would leap beyond the canvas’s edges if given the chance. This red color, with the same dynamicity in both places, interrupts crosses and streaks parabolically across the canvas with abandon. It gives no quarter for extrinsic structure or order: it creates its own order in its wake, sees everything from itself, destroys so as to create. This dynamicity is movement; it is “abstract speed + sound.” Movement leaps beyond itself, is itself by changing, by perpetually leaving, by always destroying the results of its actions and thereby creating new results.

The red here is like blood, as per the violence that characterizes this irruptive transcendence and the longing for it. This red is a wound, a gash, a scar. It lets the interiority of movement, of the act of predication, inflow into the exteriority of what is merely predicated. This influx, this revelation, is of the conditions of predication into the predicated world. The seen, recognized acceptance of the reality of sight, of the way I see, a proprioception of perception.

2.4 Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

Ludwig Wittgenstein, perhaps the most renowned philosopher of the twentieth century, published only one book-length work during his lifetime: the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Composed only a set of numbered, aphoristic propositions, the *Tractatus* sets out to show how “the method of formulating [the problems of philosophy] rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language” (Wittgenstein 2009 27). He writes that “its whole meaning could be
summed up somewhat as follows: what can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent” (27).

Though it was published in 1922, the notebooks from which Wittgenstein derived its material begin in August 1914, the very month in which the Great War broke out (Wittgenstein 1961 1-2). Moreover, while Wittgenstein began work on it in a hut he built outside a village in Norway in 1914, he volunteered later that year to join the Austrian army in the Eastern Front. Therefore, the work (which he finished in 1918), was written almost entirely in war conditions (Oxaal xi).

Moreover, the work itself deals with the themes I have outlined as implicit in any urge for violence like the one implicit in the cultural sphere around 1914. The Tractatus aims to draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). (Wittgenstein 2009 27)

Wittgenstein here argues that his work aims to draw a limit, not precisely to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts, since thinking cannot get outside of itself. Implicit here is the idea that thought cannot think itself, and, more specifically, that there is a difference between thought and the expression of thoughts. At issue for Wittgenstein, here, is the difference between thoughts and what produces thoughts, the difference between the prior and the posterior.

Wittgenstein, moreover, argues that there is a crucial distinction saying and showing. In his “picture theory” of language, where “the picture is a model of reality” (33) and the picture “is like a scale applied to reality” (33), “what the picture must have in common with reality in order to be to represent it after its manner--rightly or falsely--is its form of representation” (34), and,
crucially, “the picture however, cannot represent its form of representation; it shows it forth” (34). The form of representation, the commonality between the picture and its object, is therefore something that cannot be represented in a picture. It can, however, be shown in a picture. This is not unlike the difference between the screen that a film is played on and the film itself, for the one provides the conditions for the other and the one cannot depict the other.

This, however, is also a distinction between representation and what transcends representation, between representation and expression as I have defined it. For Wittgenstein, this “form of expression,” what cannot be pictured, is arguably that “whereof one cannot speak,” about which “one must remain silent.” As such, the Tractatus distinguishes speech from silence, from the silence that transcends speech. This transcendence is the transcendence of the unspeakable.

In fact, one could say that what turns up in Marinetti as the novelty of violence, what turns up in history as the excitement and enthusiasm of the war, is what turns up in Wittgenstein as a focus on the unspeakable. In the same way that Kandinsky’s works are fragmentary and despatialized, moreover, and in the same way that these mosaic quality shows a transcendence of space and time, Wittgenstein’s work is fragmentary. His propositions do not inhere in a shared structure. There is no continuity between them. Only inference, only intuition. They are so many lights flashing in a spaceless space, lights that bring their own space with them, lights that shine in darkness. This darkness, this intuition, is silence, the point of his book. The book is a work of silence; every proposition is like a rustle or a murmur in a cathedral or a mosque.

This religious character is not inappropriate. Wittgenstein makes the Tractatus climax on “the mystical.” Take, for example, Proposition 6.41:
The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value--and if there were it would be of no value. If there is a value which is of value, it must lie outside all happening and being-so. For all happening and being-so is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie in the world, for otherwise this would again be accidental. It must lie outside the world.

(105)

Or 6.44: “Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is” (107).

The mystical is what shows itself, the “what” itself. It makes itself known not in the facts of the world, not in “what is the case,” the world (29), but in the reality that those facts are the case. Not the world, but what thereby lies beyond the world as the conditions of the world.

The mystical is, then, also value. Wittgenstein notices, on this point, that “if good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language” (106) and that the world “Must so to speak wax and wane as a whole” (106). The world, the world of facts, does not change. Value, however, changes. It gives the world differently. The facts, in this sense, serve as a mirror or inkblot where the mystical can show itself. Moreover, like the Biblical creation story, he structures his text in a sevenfold manner. The bulk of the “work” here happens in the first six, the seventh is silence, is rest.

This silence, this rest, “the mystical” which shows itself, cannot be said but lives in the act of saying like a cinema screen lives in a film. Silence conditions speech. When Wittgenstein writes about the world that waxes and wanes as whole according to the happiness and unhappiness of those whose world it is, this is a way of speaking of the predicative mode that conditions speech, the motricity that animates it from within, the spatiality that conditions it.
Wittgenstein rightfully posits that you cannot get to reality while speaking, for reality itself is what speaks. You cannot bite your own teeth.

Instead, as that which reveals itself in the showing of what shows itself, as the mystical, this “silence” is what I have spoken of as the gap between predicative modes. Contra Wittgenstein, I argue, there are many such modes, many such ways of predicating. But they can only encounter each other if they delimit themselves, if they recognize that they are not entire, if they propriocept. The Tractatus is, nevertheless, an attempt at such a proprioception. It draws a limit to language and therefore reveals language as language. Here language feels itself. It sees itself in a mirror.

Moreover, since violence dwelt around the work’s infancy, the work can be conceived as a response to violence. The young Wittgenstein composed the first elements of the work in the trenches of the Great War. If the mystical is silence that makes speech possible, if it is the gap in predicative modes, if it is encounter itself, then the Tractatus can be considered to be a healing tincture of what the Great War was the pathological reality. If the war forcefully delimited, the Tractatus delimited with finesse. If the Great War forced the unspeakable upon us, the Tractatus offered it to us gently, ritualistically. The Tractatus is a ritualistic container for the violence of the Great War and its psychological underpinnings. It used the sword for its utmost purpose: to delimit, as with the flaming cherubim of Eden.

Indeed, Wittgenstein’s Tractatus can therefore be considered a remedy for the pathological obsession with infinity in people like Dylan Klebold or James Holmes. The work sharply delimits silence from speech, ensures that silence never enters speech, that the unthinkable is never thought, but also therefore ensures that the unthinkable continues to uninterruptedly guarantee thought. The sensation, when reading the book, is a resignation toward
the “problems of philosophy,” that, Wittgenstein argues, merely “rest on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language” (27). It gives one a humility. One’s muscles, which exhausted themselves trying to lift the world from an Archimedean point that she can never seem to find, loosen. One grows content with his lot.

It is interesting on this point that the philosopher Alan Watts considered Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* as something very like Zen practice. He said once in a lecture about the *Tractatus*, concerning the second-to-last proposition in it which compares the book to a ladder that one throws away “after he has climbed up on it” (108), that it “

directly parallels the ancient Buddhist simile of the Buddhist doctrine being a raft to cross a river to cross from the shore of samsara to the shore of nirvana, rom life lived, in other words, as a vicious circle, to the life of liberation. It goes on to say after you’ve crossed the river you don’t pick up the raft and carry it with you. You leave it behind.” (Watts)

The *Tractatus*, in other words, points beyond itself. Like a koan, it untangles the mind’s preoccupations with futile questions and helps one realize, to quote Wittgenstein “the solution to the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem.”

Compare this resigned, humble attitude to those of the school shooters just mentioned, who considered themselves incarnations of infinity and paragons of the unspeakable. Remember how Klebold spoke of how “the more he thinks, hoping to find answers to his questions, the more come up. Amazingly, the petty things mean much to him at this time, how he wants to be normal, not this transceiver of the everything.” Klebold could have very well taken a leaf from Wittgenstein’s book, particularly 6.5, which says: “For an answer which cannot be expressed, the question too cannot be expressed. *The riddle* does not exist. If a question can be put at all, then it
can also be answered” (Wittgenstein 2009 107) Perhaps then, the infinite loop of questions that can never be answered, the wheel of samsara, would have been ended without blood and bullets.

2.5 C. G. Jung’s Liber Novus

2.5.1: Context

The psychologist C. G. Jung, who was in 1912 Sigmund Freud’s most distinguished disciple, had a series of significant dreams in that year which he did not understand. Freud was unable to interpret them, and neither could he. Then in October 1913, on a train journey to Schaffhausen, Jung experienced a waking vision of Europe destroyed by a catastrophic flood. He describes it as follows:

It happened in October of the year 1913 that as I was leaving alone for a journey, that during the day I was suddenly overcome in broad daylight by a vision: I saw a terrible flood that covered all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps. It reached from England up to Russia, and form the coast of the North Sea right up to the Alps. I saw yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands. (Jung 123)

The vision was repeated two weeks later on the same journey (Shamdasani 18). His description of it follows:

Two weeks passed then the vision returned, still more violent than before, and an inner voice spoke: ‘Look at it, it is completely real, and it will come to pass. You cannot doubt this.’ I wrestled again for two hours with this vision, but it held me fast. It left me exhausted and confused. And I thought my mind had gone crazy.” (Jung 123-124)

After this, he had another, similar vision:
In the following winter I was standing at the window one night and looked North. I saw a blood-red glow, like the flicker of the sea seen from afar, stretched from East to West across the northern horizon. And at that time someone asked me what I had thought about world events in the near future. I said that I had no thoughts, but saw blood, rivers of blood” (Shamdasani 18)

These experiences disturbed Jung. He initially interpreted them subjectively and personally, as the imminent destruction of his world. His next course of action, then, was to undertake a psychological investigation of himself. He picked up a brown notebook which he had set aside in 1902 and began writing in it (Shamdasani 20). In it, he would turn his inner experiences into metaphors, like being in a desert with an unbearably hot sun, where the “hot sun” was consciousness itself.

These fantasies, elaborated in that and a series of subsequent notebooks, eventually become edited and assembled in an illustrated manuscript called the Liber Novus or the Red Book. It consists both in calligraphy and haunting, beautiful paintings. But, crucially, it contains even more visionary events that, though they occurred before the War, seem to predict it. Shamdasani has collected a list of these events that Jung “may have regarded as precognitive” (Shamdasani 29), which I will reproduce here:

1-2. October, 1913
Repeated vision of flood and death of thousands, and the voice that said that this will become real.

3. Autumn 1913
Vision of the sea of blood covering the northern lands.

4-5. December 12, 15, 1913
Image of a dead hero and the slaying of Siegfried in a dream.

6. December 25, 1913
Image of the foot of a giant stepping on a city, and images of murder and bloody cruelty.

7. January 2, 1914
Image of a sea of blood and a procession of dead multitudes.

8. January 22, 1914
His soul comes up from the depths and asks him if he will accept war and destruction.
She [the soul] shows him images of destruction, military weapons, human remains, sunken ships, destroyed states, etc.

9. May 21, 1914
A voice say that the sacrificed fall left and right

10-12. June-July 1914
Thrice repeated dream of being in a foreign land and having to return quickly by ship, and the descent of icy cold. (Shamdasani 29-30)

These accounts are impressive. I cannot think of better evidence for my thesis that World War I expressed a psychological attitude which immediately preceded it. In short, they seem to depict the violence of the Great War as a kind of influx, a kind of flood, of blood, destruction, and violence. Images of bloody influx are very similar to the reports of self-harm I discussed earlier. Blood flows out through and opening. Nevertheless, despite these immediate similarities, these accounts deserve closer investigation. Specifically, I will proceed to analyze his accounts of 1-2 and 8, which are included in the Red Book, alongside his description of his encounter with two beings who call themselves “Salome” and “Elijah.”
2.5.2. Jung’s Vision of a Flood

The Red Book opens with Jung’s description of a dichotomy between “the spirit of this time” and “the spirit of the depths.” The spirit of the time would like to hear of use and value,” (Jung 119) but the spirit of the depths “which rules the depths of everything contemporary,” “forces me nevertheless to speak beyond justification, use, and meaning.” The spirit of the depths, likewise, “possesses a greater power than the spirit of this time, who changes with the generations” (119) While the spirit of this time “wanted me to recognize the greatness and extent of the supreme meaning, but not its littleness” (121), the spirit of the depths “conquered this arrogance,” and “I had to swallow the small as a means of healing the immortal in me” (121).

Jung writes how

“the spirit of our time spoke to me and said ‘what dire urgency could be forcing you to speak all this?’ (122), but the spirit of the depths responded by saying “to understand is a bridge and possibility of returning to the path. But to explain a matter is arbitrary and sometimes even murder. Have you counted the murderers among the scholars?” (122).

This debate continues until Jung’s “humanity remained silent” (123). Then, “something happened to my spirit, however, which I must call mercy” (123). This “mercy” is the vision of flood.

Jung concludes this first chapter of the Liber Novus, entitled “The Way of What is to Come,” with a soliloquy including excerpts like the following:

“It is no teaching an no instruction that I give you. On what basis should I presume to teach you? I give you news of the of the way of this man, but not of your own way. My path is not your path, therefore I cannot teach you….Woe betide those who live by way of examples! Life is not with them….The signposts have fallen, unblazed trails lie before
us….Yet who today knows this? Who knows the way to the eternally fruitful climes of the soul? You seek the way through mere appearances, you study books and give ear to all kinds of opinion. What good is all that? There is only one way and that is your way….Giving laws, bettering, making things easier, has all become wrong and evil. May each one seek out his own way. The way leads to mutual love in community. Men will come to see and feel the similarity and commonality of their ways.” (125-126).

A close analysis of this chapter will show a fundamental logic to it. There is an opposition between “the depths” and “this time.” The former is permanent, the latter ephemeral. The former is less apparent, the latter more apparent. The latter is concerned with expediency, use, and superficiality. The former is concerned with the less apparent, the seemingly unimportant, the small, which is, nevertheless, the essential. The “spirit of this time,” moreover, is merely descriptive. It reduces, and it does not allow for mystery or ambiguity. This description is “sometimes even murder,” to the extent that “murderers” can be counted “among the scholars.”

In this context, Jung’s vision makes sense. The flood of death is a flood from the repressed and rejected depths. It is the “depths of everything contemporary” that inflows through the “terrible flood” with its “yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands.” This implies a more negative character for “the depths” than one might expect of something Jung seems to characterize it with, but Jung never describes it as either moral or immoral.

Later in the Red Book, for instance, Jung similarly speaks of an “overwhelming stream of chaos” (340) surrounding a wall in our souls “where everything is self-evident and easily explainable…[where] everything is simple and clear, with a manifest and limited purpose” (339). This “stream of chaos” is
“not single but an unending multiplicity,” and this multiplicity is comprised of “the dead, not just your dead, that is, all the images and shapes you took in the past, which your ongoing life has left behind, but also the thronging dead of human history, the ghostly procession of the past, which is an ocean compared to the drops of your own life span” (340).

He writes, moreover, that

“I see behind you, behind the mirror of your eyes, the crush of dangerous shadows, the dead, who look greedily through the empty sockets of your eyes, who moan and hope to gather up through you all the loose ends of the ages which sigh in them….Put your ear to that wall and you will hear the rustling of their procession” (340).

Notice here the fundamentally “greedy” character of the dead, how the dead are also equated with a “stream” with a “procession.” This is very like the flood of death that Jung saw flow through Europe. Both are violent, both are dammed up, so to speak, and burst through. Jung writes not a page later how “while you mock them, one of them stands behind you, panting from rage and despair and the fact that your stupor does not attend to him. He besieges you in sleepless nights, sometimes he takes hold of you in an illness, sometimes he crosses your intentions. He makes you overbearing and greedy, he pricks your longing for everything, which avails you nothing, he devours your success in discord. He accompanies you as your evil spirit, to whom you can grant no release” (341). The dead, here, appear as something irruptive, something transcendent, something fundamentally other.

As such, we can read both the flood of death and the stream of the dead as the flood of unfelt motricity, motricity that has not made itself proprioceptive, proprioception that has not yet occurred. Indeed, Jung speaks of how the dead appear “in” my soul, “behind the mirror of my
eyes,” in my crossed intentions. The dead, therefore, seem fundamentally volitional. They orient; they turn attention; but they are not, themselves, seen. Likewise, the spirit of the depths, that which inflows as the flood of death, is not seen and not recognized by the “spirit of this time.”

2.5.3. Jung’s Vision of Ancient War Instruments

The vision where Jung’s soul shows him instruments of war and asks him to accept it begins when his “soul,” which always appears as a woman or some other feminine being, “plunged into the darkness like a shot, and from the depths she called out: “Will you accept what I bring?”” (374) He replies that he will accept it, that “I do not have the right to judge or to reject,” (374) and she says:

“So listen. There is old armor and the rusty gear of our fathers down here, murderous leather trappings hanging from them, worm-eaten lance shafts, twisted spear heads, broken arrows, rotten shields, skulls, the bones of man and horse, old cannons, catapults, crumbling firebrands, smashed assault gear, stone spearheads, stone clubs, sharp bones, chipped arrowhead teeth--everything the battles of yore have littered the earth with. Will you accept all this? (374)

Jung accepts it, so his soul, as if challenging him, proceeds:

“I find painted stones, carved bones with magical signs, talismanic sayings on hanks of leather and small plates of lead, dirty ouches filled with teeth, human hair and fingernails, timbers lashed together, black orbs, moldy animal skins--all the superstitions hatched by dark prehistory. Will you accept all this? (374-375)

Jung accepts it, but the soul, undaunted, continues: “I find epidemics, natural catastrophes, sunken ships, razed cities, frightful feral savagery, famines, human meanness, and fear, whole mountains of fear” (375). Jung accepts this too, but she proceeds:
“I find the treasures of all past cultures, magnificent images of Gods, spacious temples, paintings, papyrus rolls, sheets of parchment with the characters of bygone languages, books full of lost wisdom, hymns and chants of ancient priests, stories told down the ages through thousands of generations.” (375)

But at this, Jung pauses: “That is an entire world--whose extent I cannot grasp. How can I accept it,” to which the soul responds, “but you wanted to accept everything. You do not know your limits. Can you not limit yourself?” The soul, a bit later, seemingly references Candide by saying to Jung “be content and cultivate your garden with modesty” (375).

Here, we immediately realize that Jung saw images of war and death in “the depths” just months before the Great War broke out. Moreover, the soul is commanding him to accept it. There is a question of how much humanity can grasp, whether a human being is an adequate vessel for the depths. As we have seen with the Tractatus and the notebooks of the school shooters, trying to grasp the infinite is a dangerous enterprise. It is inextricably associated with violence. Jung’s “soul” knows this and seems to be urging Jung to see the folly of trying to be a “transceiver of the everything,” in the language of the Columbine shooter. He must limit himself.

Jung writes in his reflection on this encounter in the following pages that “I curtail my longing, which would like to stretch out into the future, and I return to my small garden that presently blooms, and whose extent I can measure. It shall be well-tended” (376). He continues by saying that “I return to the small and the real, for this is the great way, the way of what is to come” (376) and how “everything that transcends its boundaries is “lunacy”” (377). “Would you really like to force everything you are not under the yoke of your wretched understanding?” (377), he writes, and “with a painful slice I cut off what I pretended to know about what lies beyond me. I excise myself from the cunning interpretive loops that I gave to what lies beyond
me” (377). “I want to be my body and its poverty,” (377) he says. “I want to be from the earth and live its law. I want to be my human animal and accept all its frights and desires” (377). Finally, he says “a free man knows only free Gods and devils that are self-contained and take effect on account of their own force” (378).

This is, again, diametrically opposed to Klebold’s attitude. He writes in his notebook that “He seeks knowledge of the unthinkable, of the indefinable, of the unknown. He explores the everything...using his mind, the most powerful tool known to him.” He wants to know everything, to accept everything, to become everything. He wants to abandon his humanity, to let his small garden wither. He confuses the human and the divine. Klebold does want to “force everything he is not under the yoke of his wretched understanding,” all the spear-heads, all the talismans, everything. This Dionysian self-emptying can only end in violence, one of Dionysus’ trademarks, as it indeed did.

Klebold, like James Holmes, should have heeded Jung’s advice to “know only free Gods and devils that are self-contained and take effect on account of their own force.” This is a reverential attitude, a consecrational attitude, one that has the humility of admitting the difference between the human and the divine. This attitude lets the gods run through me like a shark through a glass tunnel in an aquarium, like a gust of wind whose sound you can hear but whose origin and whose destination you cannot know, like the spindle on a weather vane or a compass indicating which direction you should head. But, instead, Klebold stole what belonged the gods, what everyone knows ends in dismemberment.

These “gods” are modes of motricity. In the same way the sufferer from trauma is overwhelmed by a fight-or-flight response that they have not lived through, in the way that person drowns in it, we drown in any mode of motricity we have not propriocepted.
Proprioception is, here, humility. What has no fixed, definite symbol for itself images itself indiscriminately, everywhere and yet nowhere in particular. I am overwhelmed by fear because I do not know exactly what I am afraid of. I drown in the fear. I can likewise drown in any affect, any motor mode, but this only happens when I have rejected its call, when it stands at the door and knocks but I deny it entry. To symbolize the affect, the mode of motricity, to propriocept, is to let it realize itself both actively and passively, to become a closed circle. For then I am no longer caught in that circle. To drown in the flood of motricity is to let its flow of energy, of movement, happen through me, to confuse my being with its being, to suffocate in a respiration that is not my own. To surface from the flood by building a container, a symbol, even an ark, on the other hand, is to let that flow happen on its own, without me. Likewise, Jung’s exhortation that “a free man knows only free Gods and devils that are self-contained and take effect on account of their own force,” is a way of honoring that mode of motricity, of being, by giving it a mirror, a mate, to image itself in. If there is only one animal in the ark, I become its partner and the infinite rends me in pursuit of itself. This, I reckon, is what happened at Columbine.

We can also read Jung’s first experiments with the “mandala,” circular, generally fourfold images, this way. They litter the Liber Novus, and they are images of wholeness, as Jung would later maintain. Like the laws of fourfold balance that Kandinsky described in his From Point and Line to Plane, the mandala lets each god image itself, lets them “take effect on account of their own force.” By a kind of balancing effect, I regain control of myself by tending my garden. I let modes of motricity pass through me, but by embodying them, I do not retain any of their baggage. I become an aperture, a window, through which all modes of being can pass.

Interestingly, there is a passage in the Red Book where the soul describes how “the door should be lifted off its hinges to provide a free passage between here and there, between yes and
no, between above and below, between left and right. Airy passages should be built between all opposed things (361) Here, as with the mandala, mankind allows the divine to pass through him by realizing its essential bi-polar nature: here and there, yes and no, above and below, left and right. Moreover, a figure later in the Red Book describes how “man is a gateway, through which you pass from the outer world of Gods, daimons, and souls into the inner world, out of the greater world into the smaller world (534). In both cases, the human being is something transitional, a door, a gateway, something through which the much bigger passes through, but something should that I should not let linger.

2.5.4. Jung’s Vision of Salome and Elijah

Finally, let us examine the imagery of Salome and Elijah much earlier in the Red Book. On December 21, 1913, Jung recorded the following fantasy:

“On the night when I considered the essence of the God, I became aware of an image: I lay in a dark depth. An old man stood before me. He looked like one of the prophets. A black serpent lay at his feet. Some distance away I saw a house with columns. A beautiful maiden steps out of the door. She walks uncertainly and I see that she is blind. The old man waves to me and I follow him to the house at the foot of the sheer wall of rock. The serpent creeps behind us. Darkness reigns inside the house. We are in a high hall with glittering walls. A bright stone the color of water lies in the background. As I look into its reflection, the images of Eve, the tree, and the serpent appear to me. After this I catch sight of Odysseus and his journey on the high seas. Suddenly a door opens on the right, onto a garden full of bright sunshine” (174)

He walks outside, and the old man identifies himself as Elijah and the beautiful woman as his daughter Salome (175). Jung is shocked at the association of “the bloodthirsty woman” (175)
with the prophet, but Elijah says “it was so from the beginning,” that “her blindness and my sight have made us companions throughout eternity.” Salome insists that “You will love me” when speaking to Jung (175), and remains persistent when Jung becomes incredulous. At this point, moreover, Elijah insists that “we are real and not symbols” (176).

In the reflection that follows, Jung writes that

“The powers of my depths are predetermination and pleasure. Predetermination or forethinking is Prometheus, who, without determined thoughts, brings the chaotic to form and definition, who digs the channels and hold the object before pleasure. Forethinking also comes before thought. But pleasure is the force that desires and destroys forms without form and definition. It loves the form in itself that it takes hold of, and destroys the forms that it does not take. The forethinker is a seer, but pleasure is blind. It does not foresee, but desires what it touches. Forethinking is not powerful in itself and therefore does not move. But pleasure is powerful and therefore it moves. Forethinking needs pleasure to be able to come to form. Pleasure needs forethinking to come to form, which it requires. If pleasure lacked forming, pleasure would dissolve in manifoldness and become splintered and powerless through endless division, lost to the unending. If a form does not contain and compress pleasure within itself, it cannot reach the higher, since it always flows like water from above to below. All pleasure, when left alone, flows into the deep sea and ends in the deathly stillness of dispersal into unending space.” (179-180)

This dichotomy between “pleasure” and “forethinking” is, to Jung, the best explanation of what presented itself to him as the “mystery” of his encounter with Elijah and Salome. Elijah is sighted and impotent, like forethinking, and Salome is blind and powerful, like pleasure. Together, both gain sight and both gain power. This is very like the dichotomy of motricity and
perception. Notice how Jung says that pleasure “is powerful” and “therefore moves.” Moreover, pleasure, like the unpropriocepted motricity of the autist as I have described myself, “disperses” itself into “unending space.” This is also what we have seen in the obsession with infinity in the school shooters. Pleasure, instead, needs “containment” and “compression” in forethinking. One is reminded, on this note, of the desire common among autistic people for deep pressure. It is worth noting, moreover, the way Elijah is paired with Salome. Salome sees herself in Elijah, quite literally: Elijah is her sight. In this way, their union is proprioception.

Finally, let us note the culmination of this encounter:

Salome says: “Mary was the mother of Christ, do you understand?”

I: “I see that a terrible and incomprehensible power forces me to imitate the Lord in his final torment. But how can I presume to call Mary my mother?

S: “You are Christ.”

I stand with outstretched arms like someone crucified, my body taut and horribly entwined by the serpent: “You, Salome, say that I am Christ?”

It is as if I stood alone on a high mountain with stiff outstretched arms. The serpent squeezes my body in its terrible coils and the blood streams from my body, spilling down the mountainside. Salome bends down to my feet and wraps her black hair round them. She lies thus for a long time. Then she cries, “I see light!” Truly, she sees, her eyes are open. The serpent falls from my body and lies languidly on the ground. I stride over it and kneel at the feet of the prophet, whose form shines like a flame. (197-198)

The union of Salome and Elijah here consummates itself in the person of Jung, and that union, that conjunction of opposites, images itself as his identification with Christ. The cross is an image of opposites conjoined, of the tension of opposites. The serpent, as Jung notes earlier, “is
the earthly essence of man of which is not conscious.” and moreover, “it separates forethinking and pleasure in man, but not in itself.....It is always the serpent that causes us to become enslaved now to one, now to the other principle, so that it becomes error” (180-181). The way the serpent “falls from my body and lies languidly on the ground” therefore indicates how this separation has been overcome, how that which denies sight to Salome and denies power to Elijah vanishes. The veil is rent in twain. Glory appears, and all because Christ’s crucifixion is shared.

This is what happens when motricity unites itself to perception. These opposites, like the arms of the crucifix, are united, and by bearing the pain I would turn away from, the disjunction in me is healed and I become a new person with a new identity. I am delivered over into a new life. I am born again.

2.6. Rudolf Steiner’s Lecture “Experiences of the Old Year and Outlook over the New Year”

On New Year’s Day in 1919, one hundred years ago, the spiritual teacher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner delivered a lecture entitled “Experiences of the Old Year and Outlook over the New Year,” the last in a series of lectures called “How Can Mankind Find the Christ Again?” Otherwise unremarkable (Steiner delivered thousands of lectures on “spiritual science” in his career), this lecture is of particular note because it gives Steiner’s explanation for the outbreak of the Great War. Near the beginning, he asks “What are the deeper impulses that brought mankind to today’s catastrophic events? Particularly, and more important, what are the deeper impulses that brought mankind to the catastrophic mood that is clearly to be perceived in those events? (Steiner). Here, already, we notice that Steiner’s claim that a mood is responsible for the war, an “attitude of soul,” to use an expression he was fond of. This is, so far, aligned with the take on the war I have explored.

He continues by saying that there is a
“revelation that is to take place, from a certain aspect is already taking place, through the Spirits of Personality who--if it may be so expressed--are now rising to the new heights of creators. In the history of mankind up to the present day, we have only been able to attribute this capacity to the Spirits who in the Bible are called the Elohim, and whom we call the Spirits of Form. Thus something creative will occur in what we can observe as we follow the events of the outer world” (Steiner).

This “something creative,” this “new revelation” of the Spirits of Personality, is best characterized as “a new wave of spiritual life that is pouring into the common life of all mankind.”

But this wave, he writes, meets a resistance. Namely, this resistance is “the ordinary scientific way of thinking,” which is “not a reality at all, but a specter, or a number of specters” (Steiner). People who use this scientific thinking, says Steiner,

“conceive of nature in such a way that they never arrive at reality, where nature is actually at work: they only reach a specter of nature….the world of concepts in which we are living today in this age of the consciousness soul [how Steiner characterizes the period since around 1450 C.E.] does not contain realities but merely pictures, reflected images.” (Steiner)

This is very like Jung’s characterization of the disjunction between the “spirit of the depths” and “the spirit of this time,” and perhaps also the disjunctive union between Salome and Elijah.

Forethinking unjoined to pleasure, writes Jung, appears to “one who prefers to feel than to think” as “nets [spinning] in gloomy places, desolate webs in which mosquitos and gnats become ensnared” (Jung 182-183) Likewise, Steiner writes that
“people today cherish inordinately, love inordinately, what lives in ideas of this kind, ideas that are ghostly images and not bound up with reality--in contrast, for instance to Goethe’s thoughts on metamorphosis. And people today would dearly like to confine reality to this ghostly web of ideas.” (Steiner)

The image of a “web,” which Steiner returns to many times in this lecture and in others is also present in Jung’s description. It characterizes the “intellectuality” of what resists unfelt motricity.

Steiner continues by describing how “souls dominated in this way by their longing for ideas are the same souls that are struggling against the incoming spiritual wave that is in fact the true reality” (Steiner). This is an image very like muscle tension. These “souls” resist the inflowing life in his “spiritual wave” like someone might resist the pressure of a masseuse that would relax them if they let it. This is an image of motricity that longs to inflow into perception, to correspond to itself there, to synchronize with itself in perception, but cannot. It leaves, in its wake, both a wave and a web, the flood and the wall that would resist that flood.

Moreover, Steiner describes how there are other things in this flood, which “carries the most diverse personalities traveling in this way over the waves,” how “what is flooding human souls, what is actually pushing its way into our souls, is strife, world strife” (Steiner). This is, again, an image of inflowing motricity. For it is not, precisely, just my motricity that inflows, not just the old states of being that have yet to feel themselves, not just Jung’s “dead.” There is also the new, the touch of the other, and an encounter with the other brings about that baggage. A “new revelation” in this sense, flows into me with eye contact, or at least would if I would not resist it, if I would not turn away, if the eye contact did not so perceptibly and forcefully cause me to confront that which stands between me and the other--my baggage which I have not propriocepted. This is my experience as a person with autism: to look at a person in the eye, even
to be touched, is to be treated as someone I am not, for I do not feel like how I appear to the world. There is a disjunction there, and this disjunction is a disjunction between motricity and perception. There is a resistance which happens. Strife occurs. It is this strife, argues Steiner, that resulted in the war.

Steiner, on this point, speaks of a “kind of thinking” that is responsible for this world strife:

“the dismembering differentiating way that today plays so great a role in science, where differences are looked for, where careful distinctions are made. This is the prevailing scientific method. In science all that is said or written is done under the influence of thinking that is dismembering, thinking that is differentiating. Exact definitions are demanded. Today when you so much as make a statement, you are nailed down to sharp definitions. But sharp, rigid definitions are simply distinguishing the things defined from the things not defined. This manner of thinking is a mask used with particular pleasure by the Spirits who are joined in this battle and who would like to tear us apart” (Steiner)

Steiner claims that thinking which merely distinguishes is actually thinking which dismembers. It overlays a predicative schema upon the world, divides it according to its mode of categorization, but it does not count itself as finite. This is, again, like those school shooters we have examined. They often treat themselves as judges of the world. They define others as inferior, often worthless, as mere statistics. It is interesting, on this point, how James Holmes drew images of dead bodies in a row with the number “0” underneath each one in his notebook (Holmes). This attitude is both intellectual and violent. Here, Steiner claims, the intellectual is violent. Jung also claimed this when his “soul” asked him in the Liber Novus whether he had “counted the murderers among the scholars” (Jung 122).
The second mode of thinking that Steiner explains provides the remedy, and it, in its own way, recapitulates what both Jung and Wittgenstein had elucidated:

The second way of thinking is a totally different kind of mental process, a completely other way of thinking. In contrast to the dismembering kind, it is a shape-forming manner of thinking….This is shape-producing; it gives separate pictures, rounded totalities; it gives contours, and through contours, color….When you dissect with your thinking, like a present-day scientist, you are thinking just the way certain spirits of the ahrimanic world think and you are making it possible for them to enter your soul. If on the other hand you exercise creative, formative thinking, thinking that allows for metamorphosis….this thinking is closely bound up with the human being. Only the beings connected with the normal evolution of mankind can work creatively, sculpturally as a human being works within himself with thinking. This is the amazing thing about it. You can never go astray on a wrong path if through spiritual science you engage in formative thinking. You can never lose yourself in the various spiritual beings who want to gain an influence over you. It is natural for them to permeate your being. As soon, however, as you practice formative thinking, as soon as you refrain from mere musing or from dissecting, and strive to think in the way modern spiritual science thinks, you retain possession of yourself and cannot then have the feeling of complete emptiness” (Steiner)

Steiner’s claim is essentially what Jung posited when he said that we must “cultivate our small garden” and Wittgenstein’s when he said that “whereof one cannot speak one must remain silent”. One “refrains from mere musing or from dissecting” in the way that Klebold or Holmes did, and instead think in “separate pictures” and “rounded totalities.” This is not abstract but instead concrete, viscerally concrete. It is to give, like Kandinsky, a spatiality proper to each
image, to refrain from mere dissecting, focusing on the differences between images, and to focus on the interior qualities of the images themselves.

Moreover, as also Jung claims, this allows one to “retain possession of oneself.” One becomes free when one’s gods are also free. By picturing the god, by consecrating the god to herself through the picture, you delimit yourself from it and never “lose yourself” in “the Spirits who are joined in this battle and who would like to tear us apart.” This is proprioception, self-perception, achieved by consecrating the transcendent to itself.

Interestingly, Steiner says later in the lecture that this mode of thinking “[aims] at pulling man out of his skin, because in his skin he has to make use of his intelligence, and what is more, to turn it toward a spiritual life. People would like to get outside their skin. They no longer want to live in it, because they known something living is streaming into it and they find it unpleasant to make the acquaintance of this living thing; they would prefer to escape it. They would like to objectify their intelligent nature, to get outside of it and sit beside it, so that the wave would only go through it and not through them. But that is also what spiritual science wants! -- a science that is not just shut up inside the skin. We should indeed get out of our skin, but not in the wrong way…[People] do not need to be free of their body to acquire a knowledge that is itself independent of what they do in their body. This is the task of truth--the other is a caricature of truth. And such caricatures of the true spiritual task of the present age are responsible for the evils of this age that have brought us to our present impasse.”

(Steiner)

The proprioception that consecrates each god, each spirit, or rather, each mode of motricity, to itself, allows one to “live in” the skin. To “live in” the skin is the allow the unbearable tension
that Jung described when he was entwined by the serpent, when one is crucified, to pass through one, in a way that allows both you and the divine to be itself. To not do this is to try to “sit beside” one’s body, to “objectify their intelligent nature,” and thereby to dissociate oneself from the life in the body. This is what makes Elijah decrepit and Salome blind. Their reunion is also my reunion with myself, the consecration of the divine to the divine so that I am no longer inflated beyond my capacities. I do not hold my breath and move. I stay still and breathe. Breath breathes itself. I need not do anything.

3. Emanuel Swedenborg and the Flood

An image that has recurred with eerie regularity in the above accounts is the image of “the flood.” Kandinsky’s Composition VI depicts “the Deluge.” Jung saw a flood of carnage and destruction overwhelm Europe. Steiner speaks of “the wave of strife.” Moreover, I have referenced images from the biblical flood throughout. I have spoken of the images that allows motricity to correspond to itself in perception as an “ark,” of unfelt motricity as the “flood” itself, and of their dichotomy as the two animals within the ark. This is not an arbitrary choice of images. It was anticipated in a work entitled the Arcana Coelestia by the Swedish scientist and Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Recently retitled in translation as Secrets of Heaven, this work is a systematic symbolic exegesis of every verse of the Book of Genesis and most of the Book of Exodus. It is worth noting, before I get any farther, that Swedenborg is epochs away from the other figures I have included, has nothing to do with the Great War, and so I only add him as an amplification of the logic in their accounts, a testament to the “inner necessity” in their images, to use a phrase from Kandinsky.

To show what I mean, it is best to give Swedenborg’s take on a) the Flood, b) the ark, and c) the animals in the ark. Here, I make no claims on the intention of the biblical authors here,
unlike Swedenborg. This is merely, so to speak, a phenomenological exercise in reading Genesis, what emerges as necessary connections between the images when reading it, without regard to the author or authors’ original intentions.

3.1 The Flood

In paragraph number 805 of Secrets of Heaven, Swedenborg comments on the “internal meaning” of a passage in Genesis 7:22, namely, when it speaks of the death of “everything that had the breath of living spirit in its nostrils.” After claiming that it speaks of those who were part of the “earliest church” and who had lived a life of love and of faith based on love, he writes that “these words conceal an even deeper meaning”:

This deeper secret is that the people of the earliest church breathed internally, so that their breathing was harmonious with and similar to the breathing of the angels. More on this later, with the Lord’s divine mercy. Such respiration varied with all the phases their inner being went through. It changed over time in their descendants, however, up to this final generation, in whom everything angelic died out. When that happened, they forfeited their ability to breathe in unison with the angelic heaven as well. This was the real reason for their extinction, which is why it now says that they passed away and that those with the breath of living spirit in their nostrils died. From this time, inner breathing ceased—and along with it people’s contact with heaven, and therefore the ability to intuit things in a heavenly way—and external breathing took its place. Since contact with heaven ceased in the process, the people of the ancient church (which was the new church) were no longer capable of a heavenly character, as the earliest people had been, but only a spiritual one. This will be dealt with below, though, the Lord in his divine mercy willing. (Swedenborg 2008 501)
Swedenborg here claims that the Flood was a literal change in the respiration of ancient humanity, a change from “internal breathing” to “external breathing.” Swedenborg describes earlier how this “internal breathing” “was like the respiration of angels, who breathe in a similar way,” and how as a result, “they had access to the deeper concepts involved in thought and were capable of a kind of perception that could never be described (397). The change that was the Flood caused “external breathing almost of the kind we have today” to replace it. With it, says Swedenborg, came “verbal speech,” the “speech of articulated sounds,” (as opposed to previous communication, which was entirely gestural and nonverbal, yet paradoxically much more articulate) and how “when the ideas that make up thought came to be poured into this type of mold--into spoken words, that is--human beings could no longer receive instruction by way of the inner self as the earliest people had but only through the outer self. The revelations of the earliest church gave way to articles of doctrine, which would first be grasped through the physical senses” (398).

This “internal breathing” is therefore also a kind of revelation. Revelation comes in with the breath, as does inflow from the “spiritual world,” and the Flood was a rejection of this revelation and therefore a literal suffocation in the air. This is already reminiscent of Steiner’s approach, where he said that the tension and strife of the world was a rejection of new spiritual impulses. Notice also how revelation comes from within. This is not by just by means of an inner voice; Swedenborg says in paragraph number 607 that revelation by means of an inner voice called conscience is already something external. This interior revelation happens instead through what Swedenborg calls “perception,” where everything external reveals itself as an image of the internal.
The Flood, for Swedenborg, symbolized the state of those earliest people when they were finally unable to breathe in that earlier way and therefore suffocated. In his words, “This internal breathing vanished little by little among their descendants. In those consumed by horrendous delusions and fantasies, such breathing lost the ability to present any thoughts to them that were not hideously ugly. The effect of this change was [so powerful] that the people themselves could no longer survive, and so they were all wiped out” (397).

As fanciful as this all seems, if we read it as a dialectic of interiority and exteriority in the style of Steiner above, it becomes comprehensible. Every serious practitioner of meditation will know the moment when thought fades away and the breath becomes still and regular. Breath corresponds to thought here, especially since the breath again becomes erratic when the everyday concerns of the day return. The experience when the breath stills is not one of disembodiment but, instead, of radical embodiment. You are returned to yourself, paradoxically, in the very moment when your breath feels as if it is an organ of the environment. You no longer try to capture your breath through thought; thought vanishes, and the breath breathes itself. But if you try to capture thought, if the breath therefore becomes erratic, one becomes correspondingly disembodied. Instead of “staying in” one’s skin, one “tries to get outside of it and sit beside it.” This, of necessity, disjoins the self, dissociates it. I cannot be both inside myself and outside myself and remain single. The breath’s erratic quality reflects this disjunction. It is labored, strained, stretched, as if passing through a narrow tunnel. This is the flood.

3.2 The Ark

Perhaps the most astonishing thing in all of Swedenborg’s spiritual writings is his observations about the brain’s hemispheric lateralization. Whereas the first hints in neuroscience of a division of function between the hemispheres occurred in 1861 when Paul Broca observed
that the left hemisphere contained areas associated with speech production (Broca 1861),

Swedenborg wrote the following in a work published in 1749.

The symbolism of the [ark’s] compartments as a person’s two sides, that of will and that of intellect, is established by previous statements: there is a clear distinction between the two sides called will and intellect, and the result, as noted, is the division of the human brain into two parts referred to as hemispheres. Intellectual affairs belong to the left hemisphere and volitional ones to the right. This is the broadest division. Both will and intellect are further divided into parts without number. The concerns of our intellect and the concerns of our will have so many categories that even the general ones could never be labeled or listed, still less the specific ones. (417)

Without investigating neuroanatomy too closely, it is interesting that, here as in the Red Book, the solution to a flood is to conjoin something more volitional (“pleasure” in Jung) with something more intellectual (“forethinking” in Jung). This conjunction is to allow pleasure to flow into forethinking, to allow “love” (that which Swedenborg says inflows into the “will”) to conjoin itself with “wisdom (that which he says inflows into the “intellect”). This is, likewise, what I am alluding to with my dichotomy of motricity and perception. Motricity, what could also be called the will, sees and completes itself in perception. Their conjunction is the proprioception whose absence severs me from myself and make me suffocate.

The Ark, for Swedenborg, therefore symbolizes a person, a person in whom the disjunction that characterizes the flood has been remedied. The ark is the attitude which lets the an attitude oriented toward the divine be reinstated, and, crucially, central to it is this two-part dichotomy.
3.3. The Animals

For Swedenborg, as with the other takes on the “flood” I have discussed, the solution to it is two-part: motricity allies itself with perception and feels itself there. The flood is survived by pairing one side with the other, by reuniting motricity with perception, love with wisdom, pleasure with forethinking, by proprioception. Likewise, Swedenborg talks about this in the context of the Genesis story by saying: “The meaning of a male and a female of all flesh entered as the fact that they had every kind of truth and goodness in them also follows. The symbolism of male and female as truth and goodness has been stated and demonstrated several times before” (347). Speaking about a similar verse in Genesis 1, he writes that “[the earliest people] called the intellect in the spiritual being male and the will there female; and when the two worked together, they called it a marriage.” (35) This “marriage” is the act where love conjoins itself with wisdom, the act where motricity perceives itself, is proprioception. Without this proprioception, love, says Swedenborg, becomes evil, and truth falsity. Their disjunction is hell, the state where the two principles remain separate, and the ark transcends hell by conjoining this disjunction.

4. Conclusion

This thesis has claimed that there was, in the years immediately preceding World War I, a disjunction afoot. Motricity—that which moves in me, my impulses, my reactions, my hopes, my fears, my gait, my countenance—will move wildly and aimlessly unless it knows where it moves. It must synchronize itself with perception, with my attitude toward the external, public world, and if this does not happen, I will be both lonely and grandiose. It is this lonely, grandiose state that, I argue, characterized the years preceding the Great War.

There was a longing for encounter, a longing for color, even if that color arises from spilled blood. As with the cutter, blood is here a symbol of encounter, of the veil opened between
inside and outside, of life. The war was very exciting at the beginning, even if this illusion was to fade very quickly. Moreover, the imaginative, spiritual and artistic productions from around the war bespeak this character. There was something rumbling beneath the surface, something unseen, something furious that it was not seen. This is Jung’s dead, the Spirits rumbling in Steiner’s wave of strife.

The only way to heal this disjunction, say these authors, is to sharply delimit self from other and other from self. This is to “stay in one’s skin,” to nevertheless encounter the external world as I only can in this way. For if I escape my skin, if I divide myself from myself, I am buried beneath myself and cut off from the world. By remaining who I am, by letting breath breathe in me, by not trying to become a “transceiver of the everything” but merely “tending my small garden” I avoid the hubris of divinity and let “the everything” take care of itself, as it will if I refrain from interfering.

This is the humility to remain silent, to not try to speak the unspeakable. When Wittgenstein writes “whereof one cannot speak thereof one must remain silent” this is not just good advice. It is necessary for survival. We cannot handle the voltage of the unspeakable. If I try to steal the fire of the gods, I cannot handle it, and like Prometheus, I end up perpetually wounded. I am not meant to bear that burden. I am not a god, and so I breathe a sigh of relief.
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