

Eating as Natural Event and as Intersubjective Phenomenon.

Towards a Phenomenology of Eating

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Abstract.

The consumption of food and drink becomes a fully human activity only when it takes place within the realm of hospitality. When thus situated a meal gathers together not only families, friends and neighbors, but it also brings together divine and mortal being and unites in a common courtesy the living and the dead. Natural scientific insights into food consumption make their greatest contribution to our understanding when we situate these within the larger context intersubjective relations. Anorexia, bulimia, alcoholism and other forms of compulsive and unhappy ways of consuming natural substances should be understood as doomed attempts to eat and drink outside the humanizing sphere of reciprocity and hospitality.

In the following study I attempt to distinguish a phenomenological and intersubjective exploration of human food consumption from a natural scientific one. The aim of the study is to demonstrate the possibility of exploring the cultivation, preparation, serving and consuming of human food entirely within the context of an intersubjective or cosmic

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world. Special care has been taken not to fall back into the ideological habit of regarding a natural scientific universe as the foundation of a human world.

Within the terms of this study it is understood that a cosmic or intersubjective perspective reveals the human world in ways that differ essentially from what can be revealed within a naturalist and universal perspective. Moreover, what is revealed about human eating within one perspective is not likely to aid our understanding of it in the other. To understand, for example, the biochemistry of alcohol consumption does not help us to interpret Dionysian myths or practices, and being able to interpret ritual gestures and invocations at the beginning and the conclusion of communal meals adds nothing useful to our biological or medical understanding of human digestion.

In the study that follows we make a conscious break with a particular human science ideology that would restrict our view of the human world to what can be made visible of it from within a natural scientific perspective. We therefore seek to describe the phenomena of the human world, not as if these were natural events, taking place in a natural and material universe, but as intersubjective interactions belonging specifically to an intersubjective, human or “cosmic” world.

Choosing this path does not mean to deny the immense value and importance of natural scientific observations and calculations or to slight the beneficial role these have played in modern life. That choice implies only the determination to study the phenomena of everyday life within the setting within which they occur and without transposing them first upon the framework of a natural universe.

In separating the two in this manner I am guided by the thought that even if all natural scientific problems were solved, and even if humanity gained an absolutely unhindered access to the natural and material world, it would still be necessary to face problems

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arising out of human relations. Understanding a natural scientific universe can never become a substitute for understanding a human cosmos.

It is important therefore to mutually differentiate a natural scientific from what we term a cosmic or intersubjective perspective. Both perspectives play a significant role and are able to make important contributions to our world provided we learn to properly distinguish between the two and assign them their proper role in our individual and collective life.

The particular distinction we make between a cosmos and a natural scientific universe is based in part on the pioneering work of Alexandre Koyré. In his rightly famous studies on the history of modern science he came to distinguish a specifically classical worldview from a typical modern one on the basis of these two concepts. (Koyré, A 1966, p. 197.)

Koyré had been struck by the fact that almost without exception pre-modern astronomers ascribed a different lawfulness to the heavens than they did to the earth. They understood the unity of heaven and earth as a *cosmic* unity made up of essentially different but interactive and complementary parts. By contrast, modern astronomers understand the unity of heaven and earth in *universal* terms as resulting from the fact that the same natural laws operate everywhere in the natural universe.

The ancient idea of a cosmic unity appears modeled on the common sense notion of two or more neighbors inhabiting the same region, or of a man and a woman forming together a viable couple. From the very beginning *cosmic unity* referred to the union of self and other, host and guest, man and woman, mortal being and divine being.

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According to Koyré a cosmic order is typified by the fact that it is finite, hierarchically organized and that it maintains ontological distinctions (Koyré op cit p.170) p.

By contrast a universal order derives its unity from the fact that it is governed in all respects by the same laws of nature. This order does not maintain ontological distinctions and it places all natural phenomena within the same order of being. A universal perspective therefore typically cannot recognize differences that appear crucial to understanding a cosmically organized world. Within that perspective it is no longer possible to recognize an *essential* differences between a heaven and an earth, or between animals and human beings, or even between living beings and inanimate things. In final instance it cannot recognize the difference between self and other. This is not to say, however, that a universalistic perspective necessarily *denies* these distinctions. All one can say is that this perspective cannot render such distinctions evident or raise these as valid topics of conversation.

One of the most decisive ways in which the two perspectives differ from one another is the contrasting ways in which they lead us to interpret *what is missing* from our field of vision. What we perceive as missing from a natural scientific perspective, what it fails to show us or to make us understand, we interpret as pointing to current imperfections of that perspective and to the need to further improve it in the future. Since a natural scientific perspective aims to be *universal* it remains imperfect and in need of improvements until the time that it is able to give a totally unobstructed view of the whole of the natural universe. The ultimate and ideal perspective on nature is here one from *which nothing remains hidden or out of reach*.

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A cosmic or dialogical perspective embodies a very different stance directed to a very different object and guided by a very different ideal. What announces itself here as missing from the field of vision does not refer back to the inadequacies of a particular method or the limitations of a particular perspective. It points instead to *the ineluctable presence of another subject whose perspective and whose presence complements and completes my own.*

Expressing this in a slightly different way we might say that what is missing from any particular natural scientific perspective is announced by a limit that has the character of an *obstacle*. That obstacle speaks implicitly of possible future perspectives that will no longer be limited by that obstacle and that therefore will permit a fuller, more complete access to the real.

By contrast, what announces itself as missing from a cosmic or dialogical perspective does not take the form of *an obstacle* that demands to be dislodged, but rather that of a *threshold* that demands to be respected. This threshold announces the presence of a neighbor and opens the festive prospects of conversation. Where the universalistic perspective of the obstacle opens a world of quotidian struggles with natural forces, a cosmic perspective and the appearance of a threshold opens the horizons of a festive world in which it becomes possible to encounter self and other. (Jager, Bernd 1998)

In order to explore a cosmos we cannot remain entirely aloof from what we seek to understand. Understanding takes here itself the form of dwelling and serves no other purpose than that of making a particular cosmos more fully inhabitable.

It follows that a cosmos can in essence be revealed only in part, and then only by means of an unending, ever-changing conversation with neighbors. Such study and such

revelation inevitably takes the form of a cultivation of thresholds. It is such cultivation that unifies the cosmos and makes it possible for different beings and different times to mutually coexist and support each other.

If, by contrast, we enter a natural scientific perspective we are obliged to temporarily suspend our conscious awareness of inhabiting a cosmos. We suspend thereby at the same time our desire to link our own inhabited standpoint to the time, the place and the object that is the object of our study. Within the naturalistic and universal perspective of the natural sciences we are prevented from being neighbors to the subjects, objects and processes that form the object of our study. It therefore is of absolutely no importance whether a natural scientific observer speaks Danish or Chinese, or inhabits one particular historical or cultural landscape rather than another. These aspects of life bear no relevance to the making of natural scientific observations or to the construction of theory. We therefore cannot discern anything specifically Greek or Portuguese about geometry, or something baroque about astronomy or something Christian about biology. Such terms as “Portuguese”, “Christian” or “Baroque” apply only to a neighborly, inhabited cosmos, they lack all purchase within a natural scientific universe. It is for this reason that the phenomena we observe from a natural scientific perspective necessarily bear the character of *indifferent happenings* that as such do not *address* any particular person, time or circumstance. A natural universe can be revealed only from a partly vacated or “objective” standpoint and within a conversation that neither issues from, nor addresses itself to any particular person place or time.

By contrast, revelations concerning an inhabited, intersubjective cosmos necessarily bear the distinctive mark of a particular person, place and time. They necessarily testify

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to a particular style and substance of intersubjective relations and to a particular manner of living our individual and collective life.

To study human food consumption or human sexual relations from a universal and uninhabited perspective leads us inexorably to regard these human phenomena as natural events. The ultimate significance of these events is then determined by the role these play within the universal whole of material events that make up a natural universe. By contrast, to place these human phenomena within a cosmic perspective means to reveal them in the very different light of neighborly relations and in terms of how they build and maintain a particular intersubjective world.

Animal Feeding and Human Eating.

While studying human sexual behavior or human food consumption from a natural scientific or universal perspective we momentarily take no notice of the fact that human beings *inhabit* the earth and that the phenomenon of habitation sets human beings radically apart from natural objects, animals, gods or demons. In such studies we also place in abeyance our understanding of human subjectivity as essentially intersubjectivity and of a human world as essentially an interpersonal world governed, not merely by natural limits and barriers but by culturally elaborated thresholds. Viewed from the perspective of a natural scientific universe a human sexual encounter or the sharing of a meal makes its appearance as a natural event in the form of an interlocking series

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of biochemical and physiological interactions. Within a cosmos, however, we experience such events as culturally guided encounters between a self and another, between a host and a guest. Within that perspective such encounters are understood as guided more or less successfully by hospitable thresholds that preserve the integrity of a human cosmos.

Once we note the profound differences between a universal and a cosmic perspective we should not fall in the error of exclusively championing the one to the detriment of the other. It is all too obvious that biochemical and biological investigations into sexual, agricultural, culinary and dietary practices have yielded an impressive harvest of useful and practical information. Yet it is also evident that this harvest of information remains a mere inert possession without further benefit to our life in the absence of any understanding of the rules that govern hospitable exchanges in an inhabited human cosmos.

Within the context of a cosmos sexuality manifests itself as a human encounter that links a past to a present and a future, a self to an other, a house to a house and a neighbor to another neighbor. Human sexuality as it is lived within the inhabited cosmos is governed by the law of the threshold, all at once linking together and holding apart human bodies, families, domains, times and places. The same can be said about human eating and about the specific ways in which human beings produce, prepare, eat and share their food.

We should be aware, however, of the limitations that are inherent in each approach. A cosmic reflection on dietary practices is not likely to yield information about carcinogens or the usefulness of dietary supplements. But a natural scientific account of dietary or sexual practices remains blind to the fact that such practices can either build or fail to

build a human world. The particular manner in which we eat or make love in a cosmos cannot be divorced from the particular ways in which we seek to maintain and support that cosmos and hold it together as an inhabitable world. This concern cannot help but attract us to historical studies of communal practices and traditional narratives in which food exchange and consumption play an important role.

To understand the role of human food consumption in the building and maintaining of an inhabitable cosmos we must to let go of the natural scientific prejudice that regards food consumption solely in biological terms as a vital function.

To understand human eating as a form and a manner of inhabiting the earth means to recognize it *as an activity that conforms in all respects to the law of the threshold*. Within this context it is no longer possible to assimilate human eating to animal acts of grabbing, killing, plucking or grazing foodstuffs. Nor can it be reduced to biological acts of chewing, ingesting or digesting edible things. Within the human cosmos the most fundamental human relationship is that of host and guest and the most fundamental human relationship to food is one of “being given to eat” and that of “giving to eat”. As we shall see later in some detail, within a cosmos food becomes edible only on condition that it first be offered by a host to a guest.

One of the peculiarities of a natural scientific approach to human conduct is that it necessarily obscures the difference between animal copulation and human sexual relations, or that between animal feeding and human eating. But within the context of a cosmos this difference is of capital importance. This becomes particularly clear when we realize that a cosmos is ordered throughout by thresholds and that human conduct insofar as it forms part of a cosmos has had to submit itself to the rules and laws that issue from these thresholds. In terms of human food consumption this means concretely

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that within the context of a cosmos we can eat and drink only what someone has first offered us to eat. Only is edible in this context what has passed the threshold and what can be understood as forming part of a hospitable exchange between neighbors. Animal feeding takes place within a world of natural forces. A lion requires no intermediary to devour the lamb, nor does a horse or a cow wait in the meadow for word of the farmer granting permission to graze. Feeding is immediate appropriation that offers no place for symbolization or for the presence of an intermediary. But human eating cannot proceed without an hospitable intermediacy and without transforming food into a symbolic bond that links heaven to earth and neighbor to neighbor.

We note that natural science cannot clearly distinguish between animal feeding and human eating, but note at the same time that common sense and ordinary language make an emphatic distinction between the two. In French we distinguish between an animal *brouter* or *pâturer* and a human *dîner* or *souper*. In German we distinguish between an animal *fressen* and a human *essen*; and in Dutch the distinction is expressed respectively by *vreten* and *eten*. In Latin we distinguish an animal *pascere* from a human *prandere*, *cenare* or *epulari*. Ancient Greek differentiates between feed for animals (*xortos*) and food for humans (*sitia*)

To the ancients the difference between animal feeding and human eating was so well established that the confusion between the two became a source of ribald humor. We think here, for example of an amusing passage in Apuleius' The Golden Ass, the humor of which depends entirely on the blurring of distinctions between human eating and animal feeding. The story tells of the young hero Lucius who dabbles in witchcraft and becomes accidentally transformed into an ass. In the particular episode we have in mind the hero has assumed the body of an ass and twists himself in various impossible

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shapes in an attempt to sit at table and eat in the accustomed manner of a country squire. He leans uncomfortably on one donkey hoof, while grotesquely distorting his huge donkey head in a desperate effort to quaff wine from an elegant cup. (Apuleius 1976, Bk.10)

We noted that as soon as we enter into a universal perspective we are no longer able to distinguish human eating from animal feeding, or to experience their difference as a source of incongruity and humor. Within a natural scientific universe there is no place for incongruity and humor. Laughter belongs strictly to an inhabitable cosmos.

Within a cosmic setting human beings always remain vulnerable to regressions that lead outside the cosmos and that transform human eating back into animal feeding. Fully human or civilized eating is understood here as eating in conformity with the demands of a cosmos. Within the cosmos we always dwell alongside intimates and strangers, amid family members, friends, neighbors, gods and ancestors. The single overriding concern of inhabiting a cosmos is one of cultivating thresholds and of maintaining viable relationships that assures its unity. Fully socialized human eating, like a fully humanized sexuality makes a contribution towards that unity. By contrast, animal feeding or sexual proclivities understood purely in terms of a natural scientific universe lack the power to create cosmic unity or secure intersubjective peace.

It is important therefore to remember that we all start human life by ingesting food in a manner closely resembling that of animals. Only over time and often with some difficulty is a child able to make the transition feeding to human eating in conformity to the laws of the threshold.

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It is the great merit of psychoanalysis to have drawn attention to the phenomenon of weaning as a crucial step in human development by which a child is made to enter a human cosmos. Freud was never quite able to fully resolve the confusion inherent in a psychology that did not distinguish sufficiently natural scientific from cosmic perspectives. But in those instances where he distanced himself from modern scientism and permitted himself to be guided by myth and metaphor he made lasting contributions to our understanding of a human cosmos.

Freud's thought about human weaning is guided throughout by his understanding of the German verb *entwohnen*, which means respectively: "to dis-accustom", "to cure or to break a habit", and "to wean from". The prefix *ent* refers to a negation and the verb *wohnen* means "to dwell", "to inhabit". The substantive *Wohnung* refers to "a house", "a place of dwelling". The metaphor *entwohnen* for "weaning" refers thus in the first place to the trauma of leaving one's accustomed place of dwelling in order to establish oneself in new living quarters. By entering an inhabitable human cosmos we enter a world in which all beginnings are tied to endings and in which all greeting implies also a farewell. Within a cosmos it is not possible to separate the comforting idea of getting settled, of truly inhabiting a place and a time, from the pain of being uprooted and displaced. The child who is being "weaned" enters a human cosmos and accepts human dwelling by accepting the pain of being uprooted from a previous state of being. Human dwelling begins with the pain of being uprooted from an elsewhere and the prospect of human habitation opens only to those willing to make this necessary sacrifice. The German "*ent-*

wohnen” clearly indicates the necessity for this sacrifice by means of the prefix “ent”, while the English “weaning” merely implies it as a prerequisite to human dwelling. The idea of “weaning” confronts us therefore with an original moment in human development when the child crosses a threshold, as it were, and enters the domain proper of human dwelling. If we follow the logic of that idea we learn to situate human life prior to weaning outside the cosmos within a natural realm shared by human and non-human creatures alike. The un-weaned child takes its nourishment directly from the natural source without recourse to mediation or symbolization in the manner that marks animal feeding. The act of weaning opens a divergent and specifically human path to the child which is announced in a specifically human way of eating and in a specifically human way of inhabiting the cosmos.

Child development can therefore be understood as a process that begins at the moment when the child still forms a nearly indistinguishable part of the mother’s body. It proceeds through birth to the crucial point the point of weaning where the child comes to recognize and obey a first human threshold. It then proceeds through adolescence to the point where the young adult establishes a domain and a threshold of his own and makes place for a succeeding generation.

The movement from prenatal child to young adult can thus be understood as a developmental process that moves via birth from an original fusion and symbiosis with the maternal body to a somewhat more independent life at the bosom of nature.

However, the crucial step in the child’s humanization comes here not at birth, but at the time of weaning and with the first recognition of a human threshold. Only at that time does the child enter a cosmos and begins *to dwell* on earth.

Weaning in the Epic of Gilgamesh

Mankind's oldest epic tells the story of how a rambunctious and tyrannical young ruler of a city learns in the course of several crucial encounters to let go of his disorderly ways and to fully accept his royal responsibilities. This ancient Mesopotamian poem, parts of which can be traced back to the third millennium, can be read as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, or as a story of human development. One of the remarkable features of that poem is that it appears as fresh and relevant to modern readers as it must have appeared to the inhabitants of the two-river region nearly five thousand years ago.

The poem starts from the premise that a king cannot rule a city until he has first learned to fully inhabit it. An able ruler identifies with his city and experiences the good and bad fortune of his realm as inseparable from his own. To fully inhabit a city means to care about its fate as a host cares about his guests or a parent about the household.

Hosts who neglects or mistreats their guests, or parents who remains unconcerned about a leaking roof or an empty larder fail to fully inhabit their domain. And a king who exploits his subjects and egotistically pursues his own pleasures rather than seeking the common good fails to fully inhabit his cosmos.

The poem opens with a description of the city of Uruk as a place of dwelling that is build on a solid foundation and guarded by majestic walls of burned brick. The reader is invited to:

Take hold of the threshold, which is from of old

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Approach the temple of Eanna, the dwelling of Ishtar....

Climb upon the wall of Uruk and walk about.

Inspect the foundation terrace and examine the brickwork.

(Heidel, A ,1963 p. 17

But closely following this ode to the city we find a lament about the excesses of Uruk's chief inhabitant and ruler:

“Gilgamesh does not allow the son to go with the father;
day and night he oppresses the weak.

He does not let the young woman go to the mother,
the girl to the warrior, the bride to the young groom”.

(Gardner, J. and Maier, J.,1984, p. 67)

The city's elders conceive of a plan to find a companion for their king Gilgamesh who can match him in strength and daring and perhaps contain some of his excessive energy. They hear rumors of a giant Tarzan-like human creature called Enkidu, who lives with the wild herds on the prairie, who eats and drinks with them and protects animals from hunters and trappers. They pray to their gods and conspire with the hunters and trappers to draw the wild man away from the steppe, to introduce him to civilized life and then have him accepted by the king as a friend and companion. They ask the cooperation of a priestess whom they persuade to go to the wilderness and put herself into full view of the wild man at a place near the river where he often stops to drink and rest with his herd. When Enkidu sees the priestess he is overcome by her

beauty. He leaves his herd, approaches the woman and makes love to her. This first intense relationship with a fellow human being has the effect of humanizing the wild man and of separating him from the unselfconscious enclave of nature. When he seeks to return to his animal companions after having made love to the woman the wild animals flee from him.

The game of the steppe fled from his person;

he was stunned, his knees buckled under,

his entire body went rigid.

He could no longer run as before.

(Bottéro, J., 1992 p. 75

The poem teaches that to become human and to inhabit the earth becomes possible only following the painful sacrifice of alienation from an all-encompassing nature. We see here repeated the same themes that psychoanalysis has taught us to associate with the phenomenon of weaning. In both instances we learn that becoming human demands the sacrifice of an intimate and absolute belonging to a natural world. To enter the human world the child must sacrifice a relationship of absolute and natural intimacy with the mother and accept living at a culturally elaborated distance from her. In like manner, the wild man who is about to enter the human city must be willing to forego living in a state of absolute unity with a savage and untamed nature and permit a fateful distance to install itself between his present and his former self. And in a similar vein, the king seeking to humanly inhabit his realm must forego treating that realm as a mere physical extension of himself to which he has completely unrestricted access and with which he

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can do as he pleases. To inhabit the earth in a human way the child must renounce his absolute claims on the mother. In a like manner the natural man of the mountains must sacrifice his bond of absolute intimacy with the wilderness, and the rambunctious young king must renounce the primitive pleasure of treating his place of dwelling as his own absolute and private possession.

Within Freud's conception of development the sacrifice implied in weaning takes the general form of sharing the mother with others and accepting the self-limitation this implies. In the story of Enkidu's emancipation this sacrifice takes the form of being separated from the herds with which he used to roam the prairie. In the case of the king this sacrifice will take the form of surrendering his primitive claim to an absolute ownership of his domain and of opening it up to hospitable exchanges. In all these instances the symbol of transformation from a primordial state of nature to an inhabitable world is that of the threshold. To inhabit the earth in a human way means to conform one's life to this symbol and to announce thereby the sacrifice of an older and more primitive world of absolute claims in which there is no room for hospitality.

The Old Babylonian Version of the Epic tells us how the priestess took the weaned and disconsolate Enkidu by the hand to guide him away from the natural world to which he now had lost access. She then began to prepare him for his entrance into the city.

"The milk of the wild animals he was used to suck

Bread they placed before him

he felt embarrassed and looked and stared

Nothing did Enkidu know of eating bread

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And of drinking strong drink
He had not been taught
The priestess said to Enkidu
“eat the bread Enkidu
It is the staff of life
Drink the strong drink, it is the custom of the land
Enkidu ate the bread until he was sated
Of the strong drink he drank seven goblets
His soul felt free and happy
His heart rejoiced
And his face shone
He rubbed his hairy body with oil
And he became a human being.
(Heidel, A., 1963 p. 28)

We see here again how the fateful step separating Enkidu from his original state of fusion with nature mirrors the fateful step a child takes in being weaned from the mother's breast. In both instances the person's exodus from an older and more primitive and confluent world and his entrance into a human cosmos is marked by a distinctly different way of procuring and preparing food and drink and by an equally distinctive way of eating and drinking.

We have seen how human eating presents itself within the context of a natural scientific universe as a biological and biochemical process. Seen from that perspective the logic and coherence of eating derives entirely from the logic and coherence of a natural

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scientific universe, understood as a dynamic field of interacting natural forces. We have seen also how within the world of an infant, or in that of the natural man Enkidu, a pre-human eating or feeding eating is made to reflect the seamless bond existing between a natural creature and an all-enfolding, all-providing natural and maternal nature. Human eating or feeding cannot help but reflect the particular relationship that exists between person and world.

Within a cosmos fully developed human eating necessarily reflects the particular sacrifice a person made in order to be able to enter that cosmos. We have understood that sacrifice in terms of the toleration of a distance between the hungry or thirsty human mouth and a maternal or natural source of food and drink. We have insisted that the vital difference between feeding and eating refers ultimately back to the absence or presence of such toleration. Within a human cosmos this sacrifice does not merely take the form of a passive renunciation of all forms of animal feeding. It rather fosters a culture of food production and food consumption that actively and vigorously elaborates the breach existing between the human mouth and maternal or natural source of food. Only a human cosmos conceives of ordering human eating and drinking by means of a cultural threshold installed between a hungry and thirsty human mouth and a natural or maternal source of food and drink. For this reason human eating and drinking in the cosmos can never be understood in isolation from the need to inhabit the earth, to cultivate hospitable thresholds and to consolidate human relationships.

Life in the human cosmos is everywhere marked by the sacrifice of immediacy and by the positive cultivation of intermediacy.

It is for this reason that fully human, domesticated, cosmos-building forms of eating begins with the demand that we interfere with the natural sources from which we derive

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food and drink. Fully human eating begins by domesticating natural grasses, roots and berries and by transforming them into agricultural crops. Such eating and drinking makes us transform riverbeds into crop-bearing fields. It inspires us to produce beer from barley and wine from grapes. It urges us to transform scrawny wild pigs into plump, domesticated animals, wild herd animals into fast-footed and load-carrying horses and oxen, milk-supplying goats and cows and egg-producing chickens. These human variations on the theme of natural foods provided by an unadulterated nature already break the continuity between mouth and a natural source and as such form already part of the work of weaning. Within this context weaning refers to an original sacrifice understood as an exodus from paradise and entrance into a human cosmos where we eat and drink by the sweat of our brow.

This laborious interference with the natural sources of food and drink is repeated in the various ways of preparing natural foodstuffs by either boiling, roasting, steaming or stewing. It also takes the form of preserving or curing foods by salting, drying or smoking. And the original, paradisiacal unity of mouth and teat is still further interrupted by the various ways of presenting and serving food, by placing dishes on a table or on the floor, by imposing a certain order of presentation, and by using various utensils. But it is interrupted in its most fundamental and most characteristic human way by presenting food within a cosmic setting as a gift exchange across a threshold between a host and a guest. It is for this reason that human eating requires a ritual setting within which food or drink become fit for human consumption only after it has first been offered by a host as a gift to a guest. Pre-human, primordial or paradisiacal food becomes transformed into human food by being consumed within an hospitable realm and by

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passing across a ritual threshold that unites and holds separate the realms of both divine and mortal neighbors.

Weaning, understood as a first step on the way to full inhabitation, transforms the very body of the child. Where breast feeding keeps the child's face glued to the mother's breast, the new form of sociable eating draws that same face into the light and transforms it into an expressive surface, a beacon, a beam of light. And the mouth that was once filled with mother and with milk now becomes a means of expression, a sounding board, a musical instrument, an organ capable of responding to what the eyes see, the ears hear, and the body feels and undertakes.

Within the world of a child who has not yet been weaned or that of a wild man living within the enclave of nature, the natural or material chain of events that link a hungry mouth to a natural breast remains unbroken. Even within a natural scientific universe the chain of events that leads from hunger to satiety or from the mouth to the source remains whole and without interruptions. Within these worlds there is no place for thresholds, and hence for hospitality. Human eating is bound to look stunted and ultimately incomprehensible within those settings and weaning can be represented there only as a cruel and ultimately unnecessary deprivation.

Yet approached from the perspective of an inhabited cosmos the phenomenon of weaning and the establishment of a discontinuous relation between the hungry mouth and a natural source of food assume a central importance. Understood within this cosmic framework we come to understand the various pathologies of eating and drinking in terms of an inability to accept mediation, symbolization and discontinuity in one's relations with the very sources from which we draw our sustenance. Seen from the perspective of a human cosmos such eating and drinking disorders as anorexia, bulimia,

alcoholism or other forms of ingestive addictions all present themselves in the first place as disorders of inhabitation and as failures to properly cultivate hospitable thresholds.

Concerning addiction and enslavement.

Thus far we have understood weaning as a ritual passage across a threshold between a pre-human and a human world. This passage involves leaving behind a world of absolute belonging to one's environment and entering a realm in which it becomes possible to dwell in a human way. As we have seen, this passage demands the sacrifice of an absolute belonging that finds expression in the acceptance of a threshold. To enter into a relationship with a person or a place by crossing a threshold already expresses the temporal nature of all relationships. To make a point of entering is to make at the same time an allusion to leaving and to invoke thereby the temporal and mortal nature of all human relations. All claims to an absolute and timeless possession are annulled in crossing a threshold. It is for this reason that the process of weaning, which we understand as the child's acceptance of thresholds, plays such a crucial role in human development. This process of acceptance is a gradual one, and moreover one that remains forever open to backsliding, regression and revision. The human decision to live under the law of the threshold remains a fragile one, and therefore one that is in constant need of social and cultural support. The decision to accept weaning, to enter a human cosmos and to a threshold to be placed between self and other cannot be made once and for all. It remains a decision that is made time and again whenever we cross a threshold. We may have learned to dwell on earth in a human way, yet there always lingers in our consciousness a nostalgic longing for a primordial state of fusion in which it

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will no longer be necessary to make applications before thresholds before we are allowed to proceed. We can never quite let go of a dream of unlimited access, of timeless togetherness, and of a dialogue from which is banished all refusal and negativity. And yet this dream shows itself just as a dream every time we announce our presence at a doorway, or every time we welcome a guest.

We understand in this light why just before his death Enkidu cursed the priestess who had led him beyond the natural world of the steppe, and placed a threshold between himself and paradise. To be human means to be forever haunted by the memory or the prospect of an absolute communion beyond words and laws, beyond conventions, rituals and civilized preliminaries. We are forever seduced by the idea of a purely innocent mingling of self and other and of inhabiting a realm without thresholds, doors, walls or windows. We never quite abandon our dream of a life beyond coming and going, entering and leaving, beginning and ending. This longing for an indiscriminate joining of self to other and of self to world finds its full expression in regressive, “un-weaned”, forms of eating and drinking in which the cultural labor of punctuation, of installing thresholds, and thus of dwelling, is undone.

If we apply this understanding to alcoholism, for example, we note that the object of an alcoholic’s unquenchable thirst cannot be found in a material universe, nor really in the world of human dwelling. This thirst cannot be fully quenched by the chemical substances of a natural universe, nor can it be fully satisfied by hospitably offered drinks within the realm of the human cosmos. What the alcoholic craves cannot be found in the natural scientific universe, nor in the cultural world of companionable eating and drinking, but can only be found in the primordial, fused world where Enkidu roamed or where the un-weaned child sleeps the day away. This thirst dreams of the pure water

that Enkidu drank with the gazelles and of the milk he sucked from the bellies of untamed animals. He seeks the drink that remains beyond the reach of any goblet, cup or beaker and searches for a food that has not been touched either by a farmer, a cook or a host. What he seeks is the vital, natural bloodstream that feeds the fetus, the warm milk that oozes from a primordial source prior to any prohibition. He yearns for a world untouched by either a threshold, a limit or a law.

While the alcoholic goes in search of such primordial, mythical food and drink, the anorectic can be imagined as standing in frozen terror before it. The appeal that issues from this phantasm is like that of the ancient siren's song. It promises infinite love and satisfaction but its deeper purpose is that of crashing ships against the rocky shore. It is the awareness of the innate destructiveness of the siren's song that makes the anorexic recoil at the sight of tempting food. It made Odysseus avert his gaze, plug up his ears and tie himself to the mast, in order to resist the terrible temptation.

This example shows once more that we cannot come to fully understand eating and drinking disorders in the manner in which these are lived in a cosmos, by restricting our perspective to that of the natural sciences and by exclusively focussing on biological or chemical analogues of addictions. What is needed also is an insight into the difficult rite of passage that leads from a paradisiacal and pre-human life to an inhabited human cosmos. We speak of this passage as *ritual* transition because the passage across thresholds cannot be accomplished without recourse to a ritual dimension.

We have observed that the humanity gained by accepting to inhabit a cosmos is not an absolute or an irrevocable possession. It remains forever under threat of diminishment and loss, and one of the ways in which this occurs is illustrated by the metaphor of addiction. In Roman law addiction referred originally to a formal legal proceeding, in

which a debtor lost ownership of his own person to the one with whom he had incurred a debt that he subsequently was unable to repay. This juridical process formally transformed the status of a free man into that of a slave.

In the ancient world this loss of freedom simultaneously entailed a legal loss of one's humanity. In both Greek and Roman legal traditions a slave was considered a mere instrument in the hand of the master. Degradation to the level of slavery involved the destruction of the hospitable threshold regulating relationships between free subjects. The legal process whereby one became a slave in the antique world can thus be seen as reversing the process by which a child becomes weaned and gains entrance into a human world. Enslavement effectively meant the surrender of all rights and privileges attached to an independent existence in the cosmos. It can be understood in essence as the erasure of a threshold that founds a personal domain. It meant therefore, at least in theory, the loss of the fundamental privilege to fulfil the functions of either a host or a guest. To be enslaved did not deprive a person of food or shelter but nevertheless banished the enslaved person from the sphere of hospitality.

The metaphor of "addiction" therefore evoked initially the prospect of slavery and banishment and a return to a pre-human world in which there is as yet no place for a fully emancipated human subjectivity. Whereas emancipation and weaning lay down a threshold and lead us inside a cosmos, addiction and slavery remove that threshold. This removal returns us to a sub-human condition where there is no longer, or where there is not as yet, a legitimate place for either a host or a guest, and hence for human dwelling.

Eating within the context of ritual sacrifice

Since the beginning of human time it has been necessary to cultivate neighborly relations with near-dwelling others, with ancestors, spirits and gods. Our humanity is not a quality that belongs to a particular biological species, or to an isolated self, or to a particular substance or entity, but describes the particular quality of a relationship that binds a self to another and that intertwines the lives of neighbors. It is also true that our collective humanity cannot remain fully itself in the absence of an enduring relationship with what is *other* than human being. Human existence becomes impoverished and finally disintegrates when it loses vital interactive contact with animal life, or when it neglects the dead, or when it ceases to evoke the gods and angels and locks itself inside a world from which all consciousness of other forms of life is banished.

A human cosmos encloses us, not like a sealed bubble, a prison or an inside that lacks access to an outside. A cosmos is structured like an hospitable home that we feel privileged to enter and know we will eventually have to leave. A house that permits neither entrance nor exit ceases to be a place of habitation and transforms itself into a prison. No matter how extensive or rich or varied in its contents a prison may be, no matter how opulent may be the style of life it offers and the number of distractions it may propose, a prison remains nevertheless a very poor and dehumanizing place to spend one's life.

To begin to understand rituals of sacrifice as practices that establish and celebrate human habitation we must first acquire a rudimentary understanding of the nature of religious practices.

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Cicero found the essence of religious life in the verb *relegere*, which refers to a “gathering up”, to a “collecting”. This verb also evokes the idea of repetition, of revisiting a place or a person, of re-reading and re-thinking a text or a practice. In its essence It refers to such repetitive cultural practices as that of the exchanging greetings, good wishes, gifts and visits in an effort to maintain viable human relations. These repetitive practices are intended to maintain an inhabitable world in which there remains room for separate but adjoining domains.

Understanding *religio* in this manner includes the cultural task of transmitting a cultural heritage and of maintaining a proper relationship between the generations. The task of maintaining proper relations between neighbors or between neighboring generations is by its nature a repetitive one that requires earnest application and strict adherence to the rules that define the particular grammar governing these relations. We still use the adjective “religious” in a Ciceronian manner when we say that someone adheres “religiously” to her doctor’s advice or “religiously” follows a particular way of life. ”. We use it then in the sense of “thoroughly”, or “with great regularity” or “with great concentration and attention to detail”. Ciceronian *religio* also includes the careful gathering, remembering, reciting and re-understanding of traditional texts and cult-practices. It involves in particular the re-living of those traditional insights and manners of behaving that are passed on from generation to generation and that serve the purpose of cultivating and maintaining an inhabitable cosmos.

Tertullian re-thought the classical Ciceronian notion of *religio* within the context of a newly developing Judeo-Christian civilization. His interpretation had recourse to a very different metaphor that linked *religio* to the Latin concept of *religare*, meaning “to link or tie or bind together”. Tertullian’s interpretation draws our understanding of religion closer

to the Judaic notion of an original *alliance* between a people and their divinity. Religion comes to be understood as the cultivation of a fundamental neighborly alliance between a human domain and the domain of an adjacent and transcendent divinity. This alliance between heaven and earth was then further understood as an exemplar and model from which could be derived important principles for the establishment and management of specifically human alliances, affiliations and unions. In both the instances of Cicero and Tertullian *religio* is made to refer to the cultivation of a foundational relationship between self and other, host and guest, the living and the dead, and between human being and divine being. In both instances the fundamental task of *religio* is that of maintaining an intersubjective and relational foundation on which an inhabitable human world can be made to rest.

In Robertson Smith's *The Religion of the Semites*, a book that exerted an extraordinary influence on Sigmund Freud, and hence on the development of modern psychology, we read the following conjecture concerning the origins of Jewish religious sacrifices:

“At the annual fair and feast of Teberinth, or tree and well of Abraham at Mamre, the heathen visitor, who revered the spot as a haunt of angels, not only offered sacrifices besides the tree, but illuminated the well with lamps, and cast libations of wine, cakes, coins, myrrh and incense.” (Robertson Smith, 1957 p. 177).

The author believed that an altar was eventually added to this compliment of a tree and a spring. Upon this altar the devout would have laid out a meal to be offered to the god or to be shared between the god and his people in a common solemn ceremony.

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A carved pole eventually came to replace the tree. It was placed near the altar and was thought to represent the seat of the presiding deity. The name "*Ashera*" attached to this symbol perhaps meant "mark". The author notes that it served the purpose of "a memorial to the divine name and to mark the place where the god had appeared in the past and where he may be found again". (Robertson Smith, 1957, p. 188, 194)

The altar functions like a border marker or threshold between two neighbors, who together constitute a habitable human cosmos. It marks the place where the neighbor appears and disappears, where he can be reached and visited.

Robertson Smith goes on to note that a temple building was only later added to the altar. At first, this building was not understood as the house of God, but rather as a place to store the vessels and utensils that were used in the ritual worship taking place at the altar.

Seen in this light the first appearance of a "house of God" would have been in the abbreviated form of a marker indicating the site where a god had made his appearance. That marker would gradually be understood as the threshold of the domain of a god and the place where he made his entrance and his exit.

Eventually that simple threshold would take the form of an altar placed before the sanctuary, where it continued to serve as the focus of religious ritual. At that stage the altar was perhaps no more than a rude table on which meat would be spread before the deity. (Robertson Smith, 1957, p.200)

The author conjectures that the more elaborate altar ceremonies of the cultivated Semites grew out of an earlier and less elaborate custom of killing and bleeding a sacrificial animal near the base of a heap of sacred stones. The blood poured at the

base of the stones constituted the God's portion of the sacred meal, while the meat was shared among the sacrificial celebrants. (Robertson Smith, 1957, p.201)

In its most ancient form a ritual sacrifice would take the form of a meal shared between two households, in which the sacred threshold is understood as an entrance to the house of the god and as the solemn site of encounter between the two households. We have understood the sacred threshold as a place of encounter and as a primordial site for all human and divine forms of appearing and disappearing, arriving and parting, entering and leaving, joining and separating. Within the purview of a ritual sacrifice the aspect of a joyful and festive gathering and joining finds expression in the act of sharing a meal with one's clan and one's neighbors. The aspect of parting and saying farewell is represented in the act of killing and bleeding the victim and of dividing the meat into portions. This painful and bloody aspect of the sacrifice reflects the pain and sacrifice that forms an inevitable part of the establishment of a threshold. Yet within the terms of the ritual this pain attached to the establishment of a threshold is overcome in the miracle of hospitality, understood here as a carefully constructed cultural bond that comes to replace the natural bond of a material and natural belonging. In this way the pain of separation from a world of natural belonging is replaced by the joy of entering a cosmos held together by an hospitable threshold.

The pain of the separation is borne by the victim who is made to cross over the threshold separating the realm of the living from that of the dead. Yet the Diaspora of the flesh of the victim, cut apart and eaten and made to disappear into the individual lives of the celebrants, is overcome in the creation of a new cosmic whole that unites the celebrants with each other and with their god. The joyful, festive character of the sacrificial meal ultimately derives from the fact that it creates a cosmos out of what would otherwise

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remain an uninhabitable world of isolated fragments. While the life victim may be thought to represent the plenitude and coherence of the natural world, the consecrated victim represents the coherence of a cosmic world that is united by symbols and held together by a threshold.

When we place the ritual of sacrifice within the light of what both Cicero and Tertullian understood by *religio*, we come to see it as part of a larger complex of thoughtfully executed repetitive and communal acts that unite neighbors and create an inhabitable world.

Within the context of a ritual and sacrificial meal we come to understand human eating as a cultural mediation that transforms the separate and incommunicative parts of an uninhabitable world into neighbors. It unites not only the attendant members of the family or the clan, but it also makes room for the ancestors and for future generations around one table. It brings together mortals and immortals, gods and humans, accessible and inaccessible worlds. Within this context human eating no longer appears as merely a means to biological self preservation, but it shows itself first and foremost as capable of establishing viable links between neighbors and neighboring worlds. In its essence it shows itself as an *ordered exchange among neighbors instituted by the threshold*.

In investigating the numerous aspects of the ritual of sacrifice we should not lose sight of the fact that we are studying aspects of an exemplary meal that is meant to exemplify the transformation of a natural eating into an intersubjective event. This ultimate intent of sacrifice shows itself even in the most routine and the most humble of sacrificial gestures. The ancient ritual of the spondee that even today continues to be practiced requires that those who are about to drink their wine spill a small portion of it in honor of the gods. This simple and no doubt routine gesture of acknowledgment to one's divine

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neighbors transforms what otherwise might degenerate into a natural unreflective act of drinking into a festive acknowledgement of neighborly relations. What otherwise might revert back to a biological gesture is here transformed into a commemorative act that reflects back on what makes possible a human world.

Moreover, the gesture of offering a portion of one's food and drink to one's divine or earthly neighbors confers upon the remainder the meaning of a gift received in return.

Eating and drinking thereby acquires the character of a gift exchange between neighbors. The ritual of sacrifice changes mere natural foodstuffs into gifts and thereby transforms a merely natural geography into a geography of the heart.

The same principle is at work in the simple Christian or Jewish prayer that precedes or ends a meal. The prayer that implores the deity "to give us today our daily bread" is not a request for chemical fuel or a demand for biological survival. It asks for the miraculous transubstantiation of merely natural products into gifts that cement relations between neighbors. It is this gift exchange that opens a cosmic and intersubjective world and it is by the grace of such gifts that the earth becomes inhabitable in a human way.

The cultural practices associated with food consumption can thus be understood as safeguards against the temptation to regard human eating on the model of animal feeding as a mere natural ingestion of natural products. We find in both the ancient Greek and Roman world as well as in that of our Jewish ancestors explicit references to the sacrifice of the first grain and fruit. (Pliny the Elder, 1956 p. 195I; Deuteronomy 26:2)

The ritual gesture of offering the first part of a harvest as a gift to the deity transforms the rest of the harvest into a return gift received from the god. This ritual exchange makes sure that neither a human nor a divine being would have to eat or drink something that had not been first offered as a gift.

Food that has passed the threshold of the altar stands in sharp contrast, on the one hand to the natural food eaten by animals or, on the other to the criminally procured food by a thief. All food or drink that has not passed a hospitable threshold and that has not been received as a gift remains outside the realm of the cosmos and cannot be consumed there. On the other hand, there is place only for unconsecrated food in natural scientific universe or within the primordial world of Enkidu's prairie. A space and time that cannot recognize thresholds cannot recognize gifts and cannot make sense of neighborly exchanges. Only a sacrifice can give us access to a world of hospitable gift exchanges.

This line of inquiry sheds an intriguing light on the often-noted dual and opposite meanings attached to the concept of gift. The English "gift" has an opposite meaning from the related German *Gift*, for "poison". The Greek *pharmakon* can be understood both as "poison" and as "medicine" and, in a similar way, the Latin *venenum* refers both to "poison" and "love-potion" or "magic potion", (Derrida, J. 1981, p.131). This mystery of the word's dual meanings of the same word becomes intelligible as soon as we realize that the essential difference between a "gift" and a "poison" depends on an implicit or explicit recognition of a threshold. A true gift implicitly *honors* the distance and difference between self and other that is embodied in the threshold. It is for this reason that we have retained the custom of presenting a gift of wine or flowers when we cross the threshold of a hospitable home. In a similar spirit we offer gifts to celebrate the crossing of important milestones in the life of our friends and relatives. Thresholds evoke ritual and part of that ritual is one of gift exchange.

Let us note also that the crossing of a threshold, like the exchange of gifts becomes possible only with the full cooperation of a host and a guest, a giver and a receiver. The

act of giving a gift acknowledges the human world as a place of interpersonal cooperation. The furtive act of poisoning understands the human world as a lonely place of isolated individual initiatives. We *give* a gift as acknowledgment of a threshold and we *slip* a poison in violation of it. Whether we should consider something to be either a “gift” or a “poison” does not depend in last instance on the chemical or physical attributes of a thing or a substance. It rather is determined by *the manner in which that object or substance was made to cross the threshold between the donor and the receiver.*

Freud’s understanding of the ritual of sacrifice

Freud’s understanding of the ritual of sacrifice was in large measure guided by the historian of religion Robertson-Smith. Freud wrote an appreciative summary of that author’s The Religion of the Semites at the end of his own Totem and Taboo. The psychoanalytic approach to ritual was also much influenced, however, by the writings of Darwin and Lamarck. Freud drew in particular on the work of the English anthropologist John Atkinson who himself had attempted to build a theory of culture on a Darwinian foundation. It is on the basis of these combined sources that Freud constructed his myth of the savage sons who slew and ate their own father and then resurrected him in the form of a totem. Freud wrote:

“ Darwin deduced from the habits of higher apes that men, too, originally lived in comparatively small groups or hordes within which the jealousy of the oldest and strongest male prevented sexual promiscuity...The most probable view is that primeval man aboriginally lived in small communities, each with as many wives as

he could support and obtain and whom he would have jealously guarded against all other men.” (Freud, S. 1950, p. 125)

Darwin assumed that the social arrangements of these early human groups or communities resembled in all essential respects those that are still in force among primates living in their native habitat. These earliest of human communities would have consisted for the larger part of one mature male cohabiting with several mature female companions and their offspring. When young males would reach adolescence and become capable of fending for them and of mounting a challenge to the dominant male they would be forcibly expelled from the group. The young males rejected by several primary groups would then form new groups of exiles and in this manner roam the plains and forests in search for food and occasional sexual satisfactions. The stronger and healthier of these young males would eventually be able to find a mate of their own and establish new primary groups consisting of one dominant male, one or more females and their preadolescent offspring.

A few years prior to Freud’s writing of Totem and Taboo Atkinson had built a theory of human culture upon a similar Darwinian base. Atkinson had reasoned, however, that the love and attachment of the primordial mother for her offspring would eventually come into conflict with the dominant male’s aggressive desire to force her adolescent sons to leave the group. He saw the primordial mother’s attachment to her children as eventually winning out over her male companion’s desire to exclude them. This primordial conflict between the two contradictory desires would be resolved by means of various compromises that together would lay the groundwork for an evolving human society. In Atkinson’s account the primordial mother would gradually retain her male children for

longer and longer periods so that in the end several virile males would learn to live in close physical proximity to one another. The various compromises worked out by different groups would compete with each other in terms of their viability so that the best of these would eventually become habitual and achieve the status of tradition and law. Atkinson deduced that in this manner a law-abiding, rule-bound human society could have gradually come into existence.

Freud's account differs significantly from that of Atkinson, especially in that it moved from a theory of gradual change leading from animal life to human culture to one in which a single significant circumstance or event would lead from one way of life to a radically different one.

Freud accepted the Darwinian postulate of a primal horde, and like Atkinson he imagined a primordial landscape populated by small groups of humans each headed by a dominant male. He also accepted the idea of loosely organized bands of adolescent males who had been expelled from their own families. But while Atkinson envisioned the conflict between fathers and sons as being gradually eroded by minor compromises, and the intermediacy of a maternal figure, Freud envisaged a gradual building up of tension between the younger and the older males that would eventually lead to an explosion. He imagined groups of adolescent males bonding together and gradually growing in strength till one day they could wreak revenge upon their primal fathers. The sons would slay their father and seal their victory by collectively devouring him. Freud evoked here the familiar psychoanalytic theme of sons desiring to slay their fathers and marry their mothers. But in the myth of Totem and Taboo he also introduced an entirely new notion of loss and repentance that he failed to pursue elsewhere. He proposed that at their

moment of greatest triumph the cannibalistic sons felt regret over what they had done and began to long for the father they had murdered. Freud writes:

“after they got rid of him ...the affection which had all this time been pushed under (by the anger and aggression) was bound to make itself felt. It did so in the form of remorse. (*Reue*) A sense of guilt made its appearance (*“es entstand ein Schuldbewusstsein”*) which in this instance coincided with the remorse (*Reue*) felt by the whole group. The dead father became stronger than the living one had been. “ (Freud, S. 1950, p.143)

Many commentators have criticized this passage and this myth because it made human culture dependent on a sensibility that itself derived from a cultural heritage. It is of course true that mourning, remorse and guilt are not animal traits and they have as such no place in a world ruled exclusively by biological forces and brutal necessity. Such attitudes and feelings clearly form an inextricable part of human culture that as such cannot explain the origins of human culture. But this logic and this analysis rest on a vital misunderstanding. It is true that when we approach Freud's narrative as a natural scientific explanation it becomes indeed subject to this logic and we are then left with no choice other than to reject it as incoherent. But if we approach his narrative instead as a myth we learn to read it in a different manner. We then come to understand it as a description, not of historical or factual events, but of what marks human beings as specifically human and as distinct from animals.

We should realize that the question concerning the ontological difference between human beings and animals cannot even be raised within a natural scientific context

because that context defines human beings from the start as an animal species. Freud's question concerning the *essential* difference between animal life and human existence makes sense only when it is raised within the context of a mythic narrative that addresses not a natural scientific universe but an inhabitable cosmos.

Freud's mythic account of the birth of humanity locates the crucial juncture between animal life and human existence at the point where the murderous and cannibalistic youths begin to feel contrition for their violent deeds. In the midst of their triumph over the primordial father the sons began to mourn his absence and desired his representation.

What the sons had lost in real life they now sought to recover through acts of memory and imagination. In this way their longing for the lost father paved the way for the creation of a first cultural artifact in the form of a totem that was meant to represent him. They also established a first moral law that bound the brothers to each other and to the mourned and remembered father. The totem as a first communal representation of the father became the central image around which the son organized a cult that in turn structured human relationships within the newly formed human society.

“They revoked their deed by forbidding the killing of the totem which served as the substitute for their father; and they renounced the rewards for their deed by giving up their claim to the women who were set free. They thus created out of their consciousness of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism which correspond to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex.” (namely, those about killing the father and taking his wife or wives as their own). (Freud, S. 1950, p 143)

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This revocation of their murderous and cannibalistic act took the form of a renunciation of the benefits that accrued to them as victors over their father. The incest taboo is here understood not merely as a positive law enforced by external pressures, but as a constantly repeated rejection of the impulse to kill and eat the primal father. The law against incest is here also at the same time a law against parricide. We should emphasize that a cultural law inspired by guilt over a first human transgression becomes effective only within a human cosmos. Such a cultural law operating within a cosmos represents the very opposite of a natural law operating within a natural scientific universe. Cultural prohibitions constitute the very basis of a human society, while natural law merely calculates or narrates what is likely to occur in a natural universe. Cultural law designs and maintains a human society, while natural law simply describes the most likely course to be taken by a natural events.

We remain still confronted by the mystery of what made the brothers cross over the dividing line between a natural or divine realm and a properly human one. What was it that transformed a merely natural or animal life into a fully human existence?

Clearly this momentous change was not brought about by the act of killing or eating the progenitor. Freud's myth does not tell us that the metamorphosis was brought about by a violent deed. He simply notes that the momentous change first announced itself in the manner in which the brothers came in retrospect to regard that deed.

Within the purview of a natural scientific universe there is no place for right or wrong, only for success and failure. Natural law calculates or narrates what is possible and impossible within the enclave of nature. It remains entirely silent about right or wrong or guilt and innocence. It leaves no place for regretting past deeds or for imagining what the world might have been like had we not given in to a particular temptation or

committed certain deeds. The appearance of guilt associated with the killing and eating of the father marks the particular place and time when the sons ceased being completely enclosed by a natural scientific or paradisiacal world and crossed over into a truly human world. We may state as a general psychological law that only a cosmos possesses the kind of time and place in which guilt can be felt, in which acts can be regretted and restitution can be made.

Freud's myth can therefore not be completely separated from the myth of Genesis. In that latter myth there also is question of the protagonists eating a forbidden fruit. That narrative too makes mention of mankind's expulsion from a domain of literal and material plenitude and its entrance into a human cosmos. And these narratives all make clear that transgressions can be regretted only where there are thresholds and where absence and longing have taken up residence. It is only in such a cosmic world that an absent father could come to fully manifest himself. It is only in a cosmos that Adam and Eve, or Enkidu, or the cannibalistic brother's of Freud's tale become fully capable of remembering or imagining, of fully seeing and understanding. Within a cosmos such human acts are no longer experienced as natural events but as specifically human intersubjective interactions that have their ultimate foundation in an attitude of mutual hospitality. There can be no human act of remembering, imagining or regretting within an universal space and time because it makes no place for thresholds and leaves no room for hospitality.

The creation myths of Genesis, of the Gilgamesh Epic, or even the derivative myths of Freud and Atkinson should be understood as exploring the unfathomable mystery of our own humanization and our entrance into a human cosmos. These myths are meant to evoke, but not to remove the mystery of the birth of a difference that separates animal

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life from human existence and that sets apart the being of gods and ancestors from those who remember and honor them. They all tell the story of an exodus from paradise, or from a natural realm from which nothing and nobody was missing and where all creatures lived in complete continuity with the gods and with nature. They all describe the sudden awareness of a loss and the appearance of an absence at the heart of a natural or divine plenitude.

Within the Freudian myth of the cannibalistic brothers this absence gave rise to feelings of loneliness, longing, nostalgia, regret and guilt, but it also permitted the brothers to construct an altar, to make sacrifices, to share bread and create communal symbols. In final instance, this absence formed the center of a newly created social world.

It is also possible to think of the myth as recounting the birth of an entirely new human attitude towards absence and incompleteness. From the perspective of a natural universe or a paradise absence and incompleteness are intolerable or even unthinkable. The French chemist Lavoisier expressed this thought in a colorful way with his aphorism to the effect that "the natural world hates a vacuum". It would perhaps be more to the point to observe that a natural scientific world elicits a different human attitude towards absence than does a dual cosmos. We might state it as a general rule that when human beings imagine themselves as living in a natural universe they become by that act of imagination intolerant of all forms of absence and hostile to the idea of an inescapable human incompleteness. The same results obtain when we imagine ourselves as living in an utopia or a paradise. Under those circumstances any hint of absence, any sign of a vacuum immediately arouses the impulse to fill or erase it. Any awareness of one's own incompleteness becomes then a motive for filling up holes, for stuffing and gorging, or its opposite, for isolating and starving oneself. As we already saw on several occasions, to

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enter the realm of a human cosmos demands that we sacrifice all our dreams of absolute satiety, literal completeness, total knowledge or absolute self-sufficiency. Lavoisier's terse phrase about a natural universe hating a vacuum, should thus be amplified with the additional observation that a cosmos demands as its absolute center a tolerated absence that is symbolized by a threshold.

Freud's narrative repeats the story of the ancient creation myths that tell of the birth of a new attitude towards absence and human incompleteness by entering a cosmos.

Adopting this new attitude and entering into a cosmos demands a new form of eating that is inaugurated by the sacrifice of a cannibalistic appropriation of one's neighbor and by a formulations of the first rules of hospitality. That sacrifice permits absence and incompleteness to take up permanent residence in the human world. Within a natural or paradisiacal world absence constitutes a scandal that cries out for the reestablishment of literal continuity and material plenitude. But within a human cosmos it is transformed into a privileged place of encounter where self and other are permitted for the first time to come into full presence of each other.

Freud describes the change of heart of the cannibalistic brothers almost as a classical Christian conversion experience. He tells us that in the midst of their feasting they came to experience a sense of guilt ("*es entstand ein Schuldbewusstsein*"). They were overcome by a feeling that Freud describes as *Reue*, and that we may translate either as "repentance", "regret" or "remorse" The German word recalls here the English "rueful" for sadness and regret, and the Dutch *rouwen* for mourning or grieving. The experience of repentance and remorse is here inescapably linked to the passage from a natural state

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of fullness and completion to a *weaned* and completely human state in which incompleteness and lack is fully accepted. This passage from a merely natural to a cultural world remains here inextricably linked to the suffering of a loss. Yet in the strange alchemy of that transition the one who completes the passage regains in a new and much richer way all that was previously left behind. A “natural”, father who has as yet not been distanced in sacrifice cannot make himself fully visible or understandable within the limits of a natural world, in the same way that a completely devoured father cannot manifest himself to those who devoured him. Only a father from whom we have distanced ourselves, to whom we have lost absolute access and control can make his appearance to us *in person*. Freud expresses this thought by noting that “the dead father became stronger than the living one had ever been. “ (Freud, S. 1950, p143)

The natural father of the natural world of the primordial horde had never been a person and never had enjoyed a human relationship with his sons. In this way the imagined and remembered father became the true forefather of the cosmos and the founder of all subsequent forms of social life. A natural universe may contain strong, mature and procreative males, but it cannot make place for a true father or mother. The most provocative element of Freud’s creation myth is his attribution of the father function to a symbolic representation of the paternal ancestor, rather than to a biological, natural or flesh and blood progenitor. In a human cosmos one becomes a father not by virtue of a biological event, but by embracing and incorporating a human ideal and by submitting to a set of laws that assures the viability and integrity of a cosmos.

Within a natural universe the masculine and feminine procreative function is a natural given, it is the effect of a natural cause. But within the human cosmos fatherhood demands submission to the laws governing family relations. Seen from the perspective

of the Freudian myth such fatherhood is already implied in abjuring cannibalistic practices and in accepting the ritual of sacrifice as an inherent part of human conduct.

In summary we might say that the natural sons of a natural father must forswear cannibalism if they seek entrance into a human cosmos. By cannibalism we understand here a type of eating, and a way of "being in the world", that tolerates no absence or distance and that therefore leaves no room in which another person might manifest himself. Such eating is compatible only with living in a natural or paradisiacal world that tolerates no absence and that cannot make room for the manifestation of self to other. Entering a cosmos demands a new form of eating that specifically renounces a literal filling and gorging and that specifically leaves room for the appearance of a self and an other. This new form of eating is inaugurated by a sacrifice that introduces absence into our world. A natural eating understood as a mere filling of the stomach or as a way to meet the material needs of a biological organism is here transformed by a sacrifice into a hospitable meal. Hospitable eating, as contrasted with biological feeding, is capable of joining man to woman, neighbor to neighbor, the living to the dead and divine beings to mortal beings. Such hospitable eating joins heaven to earth and in that manner it builds and maintains an inhabitable cosmos.

The myth of Erysichthon, the intemperate eater.

The Alexandrian poet Kallimachus told the myth of Erysichthon within the context of his Ode to Demeter, The ode itself was modeled on the traditional ritual procession in honor

of the Greek earth-goddess. Demeter was the divine maternal being who each spring clothed the Greek landscape in green, brought fertility to the farmer's fields and orchards and was in particular associated with the harvest of grain. Kallimachus inserted the myth of Erysichthon at that specific point in his ode where the women participating in the procession shouted the following prayer:

" Hail Demeter, the stout and fecund goddess who feeds us" (*Damater méga chaire, polytrophe, polymédimne*) (Cahen, 1961, p. 304)

It was at that moment that the *kalathos*, the symbolic basket of Demeter, was brought out into the open and shown to the celebrants. This high point of the ritual procession re-enacted the mythic epiphany of the goddess. It represented that precise moment in the mythic cycle when after her months-long search for her daughter Kore the goddess returned back to earth to offer mankind the bounty of her harvest..

We may assume that the myth of Erysichthon was inserted at this highpoint of the ritual revelation of the goddess in order to juxtapose two very different attitudes towards the goddess and towards the consumption of human food. The myth can thus be understood as offering a reflection on human eating and as containing a warning as to what might be the consequences of failing to maintain a proper relationship to the goddess. The right relationship to the goddess and the food she offers is here exemplified by the ode itself, as well as by the religious procession it describes and celebrates. Both take the form of thankfully receiving the divine host and the bounty she has brought to the table.

This right relationship is also exemplified in the care the poet exercised in presenting the goddess not merely as a dispenser of food, but as first and foremost a concerned

mother who seeks to be re-united to her kidnapped daughter. Incidentally, the story of Kore, the daughter, illustrates the peculiar power of a shared meal to bind together those who are gathered around the table. During her sojourn in the underworld Kore came to accept a single seed of a pomegranate from the hands of Hades, the ruler of the underworld. By that simple and minimal gesture of consent Kore became symbolically bound to Hades and was subsequently required to spend part of the year with him in his gloomy subterranean abode. We might say that in accepting a single bite of food from him, Kore had consented to forming a cosmos with her subterranean host.

In the traditional processions in honor of Demeter special care was taken to emphasize the goddess' role as a concerned mother. This part of the myth was represented by women who prepared themselves for their role by a prolonged period of fasting during which they also abstained from bathing, combing and dressing. They thus sought to represent the appearance and the state of mind of a frantic mother in a desperate search for her lost child. Their parched and emaciated appearance also was meant to evoke the neglected and barren appearance of the fields and orchards during the period of absence of the goddess.

We notice here again the general rule that in a cosmos the primary absence is the *absence of a person* and not the lack of things, objects or substances. The barrenness of the fields is not fully represented by the absence of foodstuffs or the lack of greenery. This lack is felt on its deepest level as the absence of the goddess and her daughter. In the world opened by myth, ritual procession and poems the absence or presence of food is experienced as a mask that announces the more fundamental absence or presence of that particular *other* with whom we are building and inhabiting a cosmos. Demeter represents a world in which the need to consume food and drink can never be

completely separated from the more fundamental human need to form intersubjective relations, and establish hospitable exchanges between neighbors.

This larger context of the poem sets the stage for the telling of the myth of Erysichthon. If sound and companionable human eating is based on a good relationship with the goddess, then a distorted transgressive relationship with her will inevitably lead to lonely and pathological forms of eating and drinking.

The story of Erysichthon is set in motion by a serious transgression. The young prince enters the sacred grove of Demeter with twenty of his companions with the intention of cutting down a sacred pine tree whose crown was said to have touched the heavens. This particular pine had been the favorite one of the nymphs in the grove, who would gather around it at noon to dance and sing. Erysichthon wished to harvest the tree and use it as a crossbeam for a huge banquet hall he planned to build for himself and his boon companions. He had boasted that he wanted to create a place where it would be possible to eat and drink and entertain *without interruption* for weeks, or even months on end. He wished to construct a literal utopia or paradise where everything would be literally present and where the sting of absence could not be felt.

Demeter was profoundly shocked not merely by this project of impious continuous feasting, but also by the temerity of the young intruders into her domain. She assumed the shape of one of her priestesses to confront and admonish the prince. But Erysichthon was not about to heed the admonishment of the earth goddess. He already found himself outside the realm of the cosmos, beyond the reach of thresholds, and beyond understanding the grammar of intersubjective relations.

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The poet tells us that when Demeter stopped and confronted the prince he gave her a fierce stare “in the manner of a mountain lioness with her cubs confronted by a hunter.” He then threatened to attack the goddess with his axe. His companions, who had stood nearby and watched the confrontation, became alarmed at his outrageous behavior and fled in terror. Demeter made no attempts to pursue them and concentrated all her anger on the rebellious prince. She dismissed him with the following words: “Go build your house, you dog! Go and give your banquets. That you may dine forever without end!” The prince was now banished from the cosmos and forced to live in a material universe. The curse removed from his life all thresholds by which to link one activity, thing or person to another. It was as if all punctuation were removed from his speech and from his appetite. The curse of the goddess destroyed his ability to begin and to end eating and drinking and he began to be tormented by an insatiable appetite. The poet tells us that this appetite was like a fire blazing in his entrails that was so fierce that no amount of eating or drinking was able to extinguish it. His hunger was so great that twenty servants had to be employed to serve him food and twelve to serve him drink. The prince became an embarrassment first to the royal house and finally to his country. He was no longer fit to dine in company and the Queen mother was sorely strained to come up with ever-new ingenious excuses to explain his absence from the public realm. Moreover his appetite began to deplete the resources of the palace. The prince had soon emptied the cellars and then the storerooms of anything edible. He then slaughtered and ate the oxen that drew the royal carriage and after that he devoured one by one all the exotic animals that used to roam the royal park. As a further indignity he ate the sacred cow that the queen had destined for a sacrifice to Hera. He then ate his own war-horse, and after that began to pursue the cats and the mice that roamed the

palace. All these fell victim to his ferocious and unappeasable appetite. When the palace no longer contained anything fit to eat the prince began to roam the streets like a stray dog, searching for leftovers and eating garbage.

The story ended with the following lines addressed to Demeter:

“Goddess, let me not befriend someone who displeases you; let the wall of his house not touch mine, because your enemies make bad neighbors...

Hail to You: Keep this city in harmony and happiness; Bring forth all that comes from the earth; make the cattle grow, give us fruit from the orchard, spices, harvests. But also help peace to grow: let those, who have sown the crop be allowed to bring in their harvest. (Cahen, 1961, p 135)

Concerning the metaphors of desire and satisfaction

We have found thus far a rich source for reflection on the nature of human habitation in myths and rituals. We also can learn much from an investigation of key metaphors that, like myths and poems, frame our thought and guide our explorations of a human world. It is possible to move upstream from where today we find but abstract concepts and find our way back to the vivid metaphors that were the sources from which they sprang. If, for example, we trace the concept of “desire” back to its Latin roots we may learn how the human wishing, wanting or needing comprised by that metaphor emerged at first out of the attempt to draw heaven and earth together into a liveable and inhabitable whole.

Our contemporary “desire” still retains the traces of the Latin *sidus* for “star or “star constellation. The Latin *siderari*, with the past participle *sideratus*, meant at one time: “to undergo the influence of a particular star or star constellation”. It also meant: “to be struck by a disease caused by a particular star constellation.”

Our contemporary notions of desire were also influenced by the Latin *considerare* which meant approximately: “to examine carefully”, “to attentively study something in detail”, and which carried the inference of studying something with the intensity and attention to detail appropriate to studying signs, omens and star constellations. It appears thus that the metaphor of human “desire” was originally elaborated within a context of augury and navigation. Perhaps it acquired its original contours from questions about what the future might hold and what might be the will of the gods. Perhaps it was reinforced by the experience of distant journeys on open seas with nothing to guide the ship to its destination except the starry beacons in the sky.

It appears clear, at least, that the metaphor of desire makes no reference to the inner self or the biological body as the original locus of human desire. The discovery of our true desire does not demand here a consultation of “gut-feelings” or innate proclivities. It does not send us on a path of exploration of unmet inner needs. The metaphor did not develop inside the closed circuit of self-inspection but within the open horizons of an inhabitable, inherently sociable world. It did not develop within the material sphere of concrete bodily needs, but within the symbolic and imaginary sphere in which we interpret signs and omens and study recurring stellar configurations. The original metaphor of desire therefore does not lead us to discover particular or individual desires or appetites but makes us confront a cosmic world in which wishes and longings must bind together heaven and earth and self and other. Desire emerges here not *within* an

isolated body or “individual” but it rather makes its appearance *in the lived space between heaven and earth, one subject and another.*

Desire as exemplified by the original metaphor has the character of a conversation and a search for meaning, and thus of an effort to make the world inhabitable by linking disparate elements together into a cosmic whole.

We find another point of reference concerning the nature of desire in the etymological dictionary Le Robert where we read that the Latin *desiderare* was originally formed in close relationship to *considerare* and once meant “to cease to see” and “to notice the absence of something”. Seen from this perspective desire refers not merely to positive actions and concrete things, to what we hope to achieve or to possess. It also refers here to what we no longer see or to what has been irretrievably lost. The starry realm above the earth becomes here a lost paradise, a no longer attainable treasure or a denied perfection. Desire is made to point here in the two directions of a past and a future.

This aspect of “ceasing to see” and of “noticing the absence of something” brings to mind the thought that Freud developed around the concept of *Reue* in Totem and Taboo. He used it there to elaborate the idea that human desire as distinguished from mere animal appetite grows out of an awareness of the absence of a complementary *other*.

When we look at these etymological indications alongside the myths concerning human desire, we cannot help but be struck by the conflicting themes of oppressive presence and painful absence, of the threat of absolute separation coupled with that of a complete fusion with the other. We can encounter the starry heavens both as an overly powerful presence that may crush us with misfortunes or as a terrifying vacant emptiness that is

blind and sees us not. We come to understand human desire within this context as first and foremost the desire to build an inhabitable cosmos where earth and sky will not remain completely indifferent to one another, nor converge upon each other in a destructive yearning to become one. Human desire cannot be understood here apart from the constant struggle to maintain a viable relationship between self and other and between heaven and earth.

This insight which we derived from the metaphor of desire encourages us to reflect on the metaphor of “satisfaction”. If we think of satisfaction within the context of an utopian or natural scientific world we come to regard our appetite for food, drink or love as determined by the parameters of a physical container that must be filled. Within a world from which nothing is supposed to be missing hunger and thirst is a scandal that must be erased as soon as it arises. Desire stands here entirely at the service of an impulse to erase absence and fill up emptiness. Appetite refers here to the relative emptiness of a biological sack and being “satisfied” means here becoming materially and literally filled to the point where absence can no longer make itself felt. The psychological or spiritual experience of satisfaction is understood within this context as an epiphenomenon that accompanies the actual material event in which partly or wholly empty biological sacks are being filled with the appropriate substances.

Socrates refers to this very same materialistic paradigm at the very beginning of the Banquet. His host had invited Socrates to take his place next to him on the same couch. Agathon explained that he hoped that the wisdom Socrates had found in the course of his latest meditation might by their physical proximity flow directly from his body into his own. Socrates says to him:

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“It would be very nice Agathon, if wisdom were like water, and flowed by contact out of a person who has much of it and into a person who has less, just as water can be made to pass through a thread of wool out of the fuller of two cups into the emptier” (Plato 1975, 175 c, d.)

It is in this way that the great historic dialogue on love begins with a critique of merely materialistic conceptions of human relations. A natural and material universe places us before the problem of how water can move from one vessel to another. But a cosmos places us before the mystery of how wisdom, friendship or love can be made to pass over a threshold that separates and unites one personal domain from another.

It bears reminding that the conception of a world without thresholds, which in our days is associated with a natural scientific universe, was in Plato's days primarily associated with Dionysian traditions and ways of thinking. This is why throughout the Banquet we find subtle and not so subtle references to the dangers of Dionysian excess. Socrates wanted to establish from the start that a philosophical discussion on love and desire would be stillborn if he allowed its perimeters to be set by overly mechanical or excessively enthusiastic metaphors. He could not accept metaphors that would not acknowledge thresholds and that might lead to conceptions of love and friendship as a kind of heedless flow from one vessel into the other.

It is interesting to note that when we carefully scrutinize our own experience of moving past satisfaction from one activity to another we never become specifically aware of moving past fullness to emptiness or from absence to presence. We do not usually get

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up from the table because there is no more space in our stomach to fill with food. We do not end a conversation because we have completely understood something or find no more space in our mind for new ideas. We do not get up from our bed in the morning because it is no longer possible to doze off or dream any longer. In all these instances the feeling of satisfaction does not announce itself in the fact that an absolute limit has been reached, but rather in the fact that a new horizon has opened up to us. We notice a *shift in our attention*, a turn in our interest and the opening up of a new path that invites our exploration. "To be satisfied" means in this case to give in to a new adventure and to approach our world from a different angle. We shift our attention away from the world of eating, sleeping, or reading. We reach the threshold of one particular engagement with our world and enter into another.

If we think of human desire as a kind of writing or speaking then we may think of satisfaction as kind of *punctuation*, as a manner of closing off one phrase or one story, in order to formulate or tell another. If we think of it in terms of a guest visiting a host we come to see desire as that which opens the door and satisfaction as that what makes it possible to say "Godspeed" and "farewell" and close the door behind us.

Satisfaction is understood here not as a natural event but as a cultural accomplishment that makes it possible for us to cross thresholds from one situation and one activity to another. Such *liminal* activity, such passing across thresholds, such punctuation, such imposition of a rhythm and a design on our life can take place only within the intersubjective realm of a cosmos. There is no place for it in either an utopia or in a natural scientific universe; it belongs entirely and exclusively to the art of inhabiting the earth.

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The intersubjective dimension that determines satisfaction becomes clear from the fact that we can both give satisfaction and demand it. The art of satisfying and being or becoming satisfied belongs wholly to the world of hospitality and conversation together with all the other cultural accomplishment that grow out of a cooperative effort between a host and guest.

It is significant in this respect that from an etymological perspective *satis-faction* describes not a natural event but a cultural process of making or producing (*facere*) that requires know-how, skill and judgment. Satis-faction means literally “the making (*facere*) of an enough (*satis*)”. This “making” finds its fullest expression in a turning away from one particular activity or situation and in a turning towards *an other* event or person. This turning is not just an empty physical or mechanical movement since it demands the closing of one door, in the sense of ending one particular situation by “doing justice to it”, and the opening up of another. We do not get up from the table without thanking the hostess, or without saying farewell to our companions; we do not open new doors before having closed the old ones. Satisfaction participates wholly in this movement from house to house, from one embodied situation to the next.

It is further of interest to reflect on the etymological relationship between the Latin *satis* and the Old English *saed*, for “being sated”, or “satisfied” and from which developed our modern idiom of “being, or feeling sad”. If we cast a psychological eye on this development we become aware of how difficult it can be to close off one particular period, situation or activity of our life and to turn with fresh courage to new endeavors. An old Latin adage has it that “all animals are sad after mating”. We are certainly aware in the modern world of post-partem depressions, and of the doldrums that usually follow when we have finished one important project, and have as yet not taken up the next.

“Sadness” refers to the difficulties associated with making “*satis*”, with turning from one situation to the next. This inability to *make satis*, to create a fluid effective movement across a threshold, leads to sadness or depression, which in turn expresses itself in an awkward immobility, fullness and torpor. “Sadness” refers here to the hesitation and stagnation experienced while standing before the threshold of the new. It produces a stifling fullness and languor that refuses to dissolve itself into an artful, gracious movement across a threshold that is embodied in *making satis*, in creating “satisfaction”. This latter aspect finds expression in the melancholy German expression: “*Ich bin das Leben satt*”, that we might translate by “I am tired of life”, “I am filled with life without being fulfilled by it”, “I am sad beyond redemption”. In this instance too “being sad” is experienced as “*satt sein*” as a being *filled* or *bloated* that appears to be the exact psychological opposite of a being *fulfilled* and *artfully satisfied*. All this points to the difficult psychological process of “*making satis*”, of creating a happy passageway from one activity to the next, of moving from one house to another, or of making the transition from a workaday world to a festive one.

We note that within a natural scientific universe, or in any other non-inhabitable world, the phenomenon of desire and satisfaction cannot be fully represented because that world makes no room for passages across a threshold. Desire and satisfaction can make their appearance only within a world within which it is possible to make reference to *other* worlds. They can be accomplished only within the space and time of a human cosmos.

Some Notes on Kafka's First Sorrow and A Hunger Artist.

The perennial themes of desire and satisfaction, of companionable eating and lonely starvation, of abstract and universal life and human dwelling are marvelously elucidated in two Kafka short stories.

First Sorrows tells the story of a trapeze artist who feels progressively more at ease while performing his death-defying circus acts, but who at the same time grows steadily more apprehensive about walking on solid ground and dealing with ordinary human situations.

It is possible to read this story as a kind of commentary on the modern world's abandonment of the perennial quest to inhabit the earth and its replacement by the very different quest to inhabit an abstract, natural scientific and material universe.

The central dynamic of the story concerns a tragicomic reversal of a common sense perspectives which makes the world of ordinary daily life appear as a strange and treacherous domain, while an abstract, utterly indifferent material universe is represented as the ultimate safe haven of human existence

The early career of the trapeze artist had at first been much like that of other young acrobats and circus performers. Like them he had been tireless in his ambition to master the arts of the circus and like them he never counted the endless hours he spent in perfecting his craft.

But as his skill improved and his fame began to spread, the young performer did not ease up on practicing, but rather redoubled his efforts to further perfect his skills. He became so assiduous in pursuing perfection that he left himself eventually no time to

relax from his work or to socialize with friends. Gradually he began to spend all his waking hours in the dome of a circus. What had begun as an enthusiastic urge to improve his performance ended up becoming an all-absorbing and exclusive end in itself. The acrobat now began to dread the moment at the end of his practice when he would have to leave his trapeze and his perch in the circus and climb down to earth to visit friends, to eat and to sleep. By now he had become so estranged from the world of human relations that he no longer looked forward to returning to the hearth, to companionable eating or to visiting with friends. The end of the workday therefore no longer pointed to a distinctly different way of inhabiting the earth. The workdays in which he battled the natural forces of a natural universe gradually ceased being surrounded by the horizon of a differently constituted social, intersubjective world, organized according to different laws and principles and serving very different aims. Instead, he became isolated within one single and solitary workaday world that no longer contained references to an elsewhere, to another time or to another person. In this manner he lost access to all forms of transcendence and became imprisoned within a literal and physical world from which in the end he found no escape.

Instead of seeking a way out of this prison the trapeze artist began to dream of arranging his life in such a way that he might live permanently in the loft of a circus.

He began to dream of a life in which he would never again be forced to come down to earth. When his fame began to spread and his income grew larger, he gradually acquired the means to realize his dream. He hired a staff of servants to supply him with all his needs so that he no longer needed to descend to earth to bath and change, or to eat and sleep. His life now took the form of one continuous acrobatic act unrelieved by any other activity or diluted by any other perspective.

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The vertical axis of our life speaks of climbing and falling, of getting up, of stumbling and tumbling, of assuming the erect posture and of regressing back to walking on all fours. But the horizontal dimension speaks of intersubjective relations, of making advances towards and retreating from others, of being welcoming and forthcoming, or of being reticent or withdrawn. It is also the dimension that opens the human world to symbolic exchanges of words, gifts and visits. It is within the horizontal dimension that we establish friendships, build communities, establish families, and form associations of all kinds and varieties. The most fundamental characteristic of the horizontal dimension is that **it** is traversed by thresholds.

When the trapeze artist gradually withdrew within the vertical dimension of pride and mastery he progressively lost access to the horizontal dimension of human affection, mediation and dialogue. The only human interaction still open to him now was that of a star performer or matinee idol. This withdrawal from the human cosmos entrapped the performer in a universal and material world where all of his energies were permanently engaged in an endless and ultimately fruitless struggle with natural forces. All the perils of the horizontal dimension, the risks and trials of making overtures to others and the difficulties of maintaining viable relationships were now removed from his life. These were replaced by the natural hazards of miscalculating one's steps, of moving too soon or too late, of slipping and sliding, of overlooking some minute detail in the preparation for a performance. He no longer ran the risk of wounding his pride or of breaking his heart, but he was now constantly exposed to the physical dangers of literally losing his footing, his grip or his balance. The performer's withdrawal from the horizontal world of social relations had thus the effect of a progressive literalization and naturalization of his world. The ordinary human struggles to form sound human relations were transformed

into literal balancing acts. At the same time, the primordial attractiveness of a welcoming earth was transformed into an abstract and dangerous gravitational pull. The primordial relationship of host and guest that joins together earth and inhabitant was thereby transformed into a dangerous, calculated and artful game in which a clever performer toyed with natural forces. At the same time that his love for the earth was transformed into a physical struggle with gravitational forces, the trapeze artist's aptitude for symbolic exchanges was transformed into a merely technical expertise concerning material relations.

It is at this point that it becomes possible to understand the trapeze artist as an embodiment of a very popular and widespread modernist ideal. The strange desire of Kafka's trapeze artist becomes clarified when we see it against the background of a widespread but no less strange, modern desire to limit one's understanding of the human condition to what can be revealed about it in terms of a universal system of material relations. We find that desire embedded in the modern social sciences in so far as these are committed to limiting that understanding to what can be revealed with methods and concepts appropriate to the natural sciences. This destructive self-limitation of the human sciences resemble in certain respects the ludicrous and acrobatic efforts of the trapeze artist to narrow the sphere of his interests and his life to that of a tiny platform in the dome of a circus.

This desire for one single invariant form of rationality and for one manner of approaching and understanding all things and circumstances finds itself repeated in the trapeze artist's refusal to leave behind the world of work and enter a very differently organized world of intersubjectivity. The circus artist shows himself as a typically modern man in so

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far as he insists on living in one undivided world, ruled exclusively by universal and natural laws. And as a typical modern man he learns that such insistence succeeds only in transforming a hospitable cosmos into an uninhabitable universe.

The plight of Kafka's trapeze artist becomes clarified when we place it against the background of Binswanger's excellent and very detailed study of an anorexic patient.

The patient of Binswanger's account flees the cosmos of common, companionable eating in just the same way that the trapeze artist of Kafka's story flees the cosmos of simple companionable living together with family, friends and neighbors. Ellen West transforms ordinary social eating into a solitary struggle with calories and chemical substances in the same way that the trapeze artist transforms the simple act of crossing a neighbor's threshold into a death and gravitation defying leap across the abyss. Ellen West is as determined to transform human eating as is Kafka's trapeze artist to transform simple human locomotion from a cosmic into a universal event.

The following remarkable passage quoted by Binswanger from Ellen's diary gives an insightful description of a purely "vertical" existence in which it is no longer possible to cross thresholds and to reach out towards others:

"I will briefly describe a morning. I sit at my desk and work. I have a great deal to do; much that I have been looking forward to. But a tormenting restlessness keeps me from finding quiet. I jump up, walk to and fro, stop again and again in front of the cupboard where the bread is. I eat some of it; ten minutes later I jump again and eat some more. I firmly resolve not to eat any more now. Of course I can summon up such will power that I actually eat nothing. But I can not suppress the desire for it. All day I cannot get the thought of bread out of my mind! It fills up my

brain that I have no more room for other thoughts; I can concentrate neither on working nor on reading. Usually the end is that I run out into the street. I run away from the bread in my cupboard and wander aimlessly around.” (p. 254)

Like the trapeze artist, Ellen West remained suspended above a human world in which she has failed to find her rightful place. Like him she failed to establish an inhabitable domain, understood as a place guarded by thresholds from which she might venture out into the world and to which she might return home afterwards. Like him she had never managed to truly *inhabit* the earth.

It is still possible to read the cupboard and the bread as an imago for the mother if we understand thereby the first mythical shape of a cosmos. Ellen is clearly conflicted about the attractive force issuing from that imago. She fails to read that attractive force as an invitation to dwell and interprets it instead as an appeal to fusion. She hovers and flutters around it like a moth around a lamp, till at last she is consumed by it. From his high perch in the dome of the circus the trapeze artist does a very similar death-defying dance around the imago of the mother earth below.

Where Ellen remains trapped by the naturalized attractive force of bread, the trapeze artist remains trapped by a similarly naturalized attractive force emanating from the earth. Ellen struggles in vain with the biological lure emanating from purely material, demythologized bread, while the trapeze artist engages in a quixotic battle with the gravitational pull exercised by a demythologized, naturalized earth. Both narratives can be understood as describing the impossible shapes and forms assumed by human desire when it is forced beyond the confines of a cosmos into a naturalized and literalized universe.

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One of the most salient traits of the vertical worlds of Kafka's trapeze artist and that of Binswanger's anorexic patient is that they no longer permit passage across a threshold. Once locked into such a vertical world it is no longer possible to cross over from one domain into a completely different one. It becomes problematic or impossible to shift from work to celebration, or from action to contemplation, or from battling obstacles to honoring thresholds. Nor does it appear possible to cross a threshold to visit a neighbor or a friend. From the perspective of such an hermetic vertical world it is no longer possible to make the distinction between the sacred and the profane, or to distinguish the practical and theoretical explorations of the natural sciences from thoughtful and artful explorations of the domain of intersubjectivity.

Both the trapeze artist and the anorexic patient are trapped within one single, unitary, and universal world in which it is no longer possible for the self *to turn around* to face another person. That universal world no longer permits what finds expression in the Latin concept of *conversion*, understood here in its etymological sense as a turning (L. *convertere*) away from one direction and a turning towards another person and another world. Within that strangely abstract vertical world all desire flows relentlessly in one direction, yet without ever being able to attain its goal. Both the trapeze artist and Ellen West lack the freedom *to turn around* and *to turn away* from their obsessions. Neither possesses the means to mediate the distance between themselves and their neighbor. Neither is able to transform that distance into a viable, intersubjective and cultural life. Both reside outside the cosmos within a universal realm where the self and the other appear either as an indistinguishable, mutually promiscuous unity or as a pair of irreconcilable opposites. Both have left the cultural domain that is created and maintained by an exchange of words and gifts and have entered a natural domain

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governed by the absolute alternatives of self *or* other, of standing *or* falling, of starving *or* devouring, of killing *or* of being killed. Their ceaseless activity, be it that of acrobatic walking or leaping or of anorexic eating and not eating cannot construct a livable, inhabitable world. This activity serves only the purpose of postponing the inevitable collapse of all into all.

What is particularly striking about both worlds is the degree to which the protagonists have abstracted, depersonalized, and literalized human relations. The trapeze artist has replaced all efforts to maintain human relations with efforts aimed at mastering the gravitational pull of the earth, while Ellen West has replaced these with attempts to master an abstract biological hunger. Both have replaced the constant effort needed to maintain an inhabitable human cosmos with attempts to master a natural, physical universe. Neither is able to recognize their Sisyphean struggle with brute natural forces as misplaced attempt to come to terms with human love. The trapeze artist does not recognize the earth below him as the ground he shares with others, and Ellen West fails to see the wooden cupboard and the bread of grain as that which binds her to others into a host and guest relation.

But let us now return to Kafka's story. We read that the trapeze artist experienced a psychological crisis whenever he was obliged to come down from his perch at the end of his engagement with a particular circus and was forced to travel to a new destination. On these occasions his solicitous manager did what he could to shorten the time the artist would have to spend on solid ground. He engaged a racecar driver to transport the artist in record time to the nearest train station where he had already reserved an entire train compartment for his use. Since the acrobat found it stressful to sit on a bench or a chair

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he made himself as comfortable as he could on the luggage rack. It was during one of these difficult periods of transition that the young performer began to reflect on his life and on what might be the reason for his growing malaise. The conclusion he reached was truly Kafkaesque in the sense of showing that strange mixture of hilarious ineptitude and tragic blindness that characterizes so many of Kafka's characters. The acrobat concluded that his unhappiness was caused by the fact that he performed on a single trapeze instead of making use of two. He addressed his manager with the new resolve to expand his repertoire and to create an even more complicated circus act.

Kafka tells us that the trapeze artist, biting his lips in frustration and in an effort not to cry told his manager that in the future he would no longer perform on a single trapeze but insist on using two. His manager quickly agreed to this request but the artist remained petulant and perturbed. Finally he burst into tears and when the manager tried to soothe and console him he exclaimed:

“With only one bar in my hand, how can I go on living?”

The trapeze artist clearly had caught a glimpse of the complete bankruptcy of his existence. He no doubt had faintly perceived the complete absence in his life of any sustaining love or friendship. He no doubt was dimly aware of his complete inability to inhabit a cosmos. Yet he remained so completely alienated from his own situation that he could think of no other way to express what was lacking from his life than to speak of an other trapeze. All he would need, so it seemed to him, was yet another set of ropes and a new program of aerial acrobatics to fill his needs. He was no longer able to step

outside his own prison and all he could think of to improve his situation was to add another layer of fortifications.

Kafka underlines this situation with a subtle play on words. The performers request for another trapeze bar (*eine Stange*) only underlines his determination to continue in his way of life. "*Bei der Stange bleiben*" is a metaphor for "sticking to the point", for permitting oneself no leeway or evasion. "*Sich bei der Stange halten*" means to make oneself toe the line and to persist in a difficult or tedious endeavor.

These themes of First Sorrow are repeated and further amplified in The Hunger Artist.

This short story was one of the all-time favorites of Kafka himself and perhaps expresses his vision of the human condition with the greatest clarity. (De Visscher, F. ,1991, p.20)

The name "hunger artist" applies to a particular group of performers, popular around the turn of the century, who fasted in public places for a set number of days.

The hunger artist of Kafka's story actually enjoyed his fasts, not only because it provided him with an audience and an income, but also because it permitted him to hide his personal and deep aversion for normal, companionable eating. Like the trapeze artist who dreaded the end of his contract when he would have to come down to earth, the hunger artist hated to reach the end of his fasts. These performances would generally end on a dramatic note when the manager would send someone to help the emaciated artist from his couch and lead him to a table where he would publicly take his first bite of food. Both the trapeze artist and the hunger artist dreamt of a performance that would never have to come to an end.

When we read the story for the first time we are likely to be somewhat disoriented by the unfamiliar subject of public fasting as a vaudeville entertainment. It appears that during

the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth such public spectacles were quite popular on both sides of the Atlantic. These generally featured performers who fasted for a period of about a month in some easily accessible public place where fans bought tickets to watch their ordeal. The performers were usually under constant public scrutiny to prevent them from surreptitiously taking any food.

Some of these hunger artists achieved great popularity and financial success. It is reported that the American hunger artist Henry Tanner exhibited himself in New York City at Clarendon Hall in the eighteen eighties during a fast that lasted for forty days. He is reported to have received as many as six thousands visitors in a single week and to have earned well over hundred and thirty thousand dollars for a single fast. (*Van Deth, 1988, p.110*)

It is difficult to explain from a contemporary point of view what might have moved crowds to watch such spectacles. Perhaps these performers were venerated because they revived ancient images of holy men, of the Christ, or of a Saint Anthony in the desert. Forty days is the classic, biblical length for a sacred fast and Kafka notes that this was the usual duration of these public performances. Moses fasted for forty days on Mount Horeb and Christ spent the same period of time fasting in the desert after John had baptized him.

It is perhaps significant that the vogue of these vaudeville fasting performances mixed aspects of a sacred tradition with elements of popular culture at a time when other fashions such as mesmerism and spiritual seances were also popular forms of public entertainment. In any case, the hunger artist as a cultural type belonged to the general

category of vaudevillians, hucksters, utopians and healers that exerted a profound influence on popular culture at the end of the nineteenth century.

Kafka was known to have been fascinated by the twilight world of circus performers, popular actors and traveling vaudevillians, and his work bears the unmistakable traces of this interest.

There is still another element that enters into our understanding of this particular story. In 1924, at the time of its writing, Kafka was already in the last stages of his progressive and ultimately fatal illness. This condition forced him to spend most of his time in hospitals and sanitariums, where he was subjected to a kind of medical and public scrutiny that resembled in many respects the conditions under which the trapeze artist and the hunger artists worked and lived.

Even more striking is the fact that Kafka experienced his own illness in ways that resembled the manner in which the hunger artist came to understand his plight. In his thoughtful little book on the author Canetti quotes from Kafka's diary where he describes his own illness in the following terms:

“Secretly I do not regard this illness as a case of tuberculosis, but as my own complete bankruptcy.” (Canetti, E. 1974, p.126)

In another passage he maintains that his illness came about:

“outside my knowledge, through an agreement between my brain and my lungs. “It can't go on like this said my brain, and after five years my lungs declared themselves willing to help” (Canetti, E., 1974 p.124)

As we shall see in what follows, the hunger artist came to very similar conclusions at the end of his life when he confessed to the circus manager that his public art had been a

sham because it had hidden, rather than revealed the complete bankruptcy of his existence.

Kafka wrote the death scene of the hunger artist with great incisiveness and economy and with that special blend of clairvoyance and humor that is the trademark of his writing. The scene opens with the circus manager discovering the dying artist in his cage in a forgotten corner on the circus grounds. By now times had changed and the hunger artist had for quite some time been unable to draw spectators to his cage. At one time his cage had stood on the main thoroughfare of the circus that led straight to the menagerie of wild animals. Gradually the crowds had become more interested in watching the feeding of the wild animals than in watching the slow deterioration of the hunger artist. Kafka tells with gusto of how circus attendants, followed by enthusiastic crowds, would carry great hunks of stinking meat past the cage of the starving hunger artist on their way to feeding the carnivorous animals. We learn thereby that anorexia, or savage fasting, lives in the same neighborhood as bulimia, or savage feasting, and that the two form together an inseparable, though mutually hostile, pair. This theme is repeated at the end of the story when the circus manager uses the cage of the deceased hunger artist to exhibit a young panther.

As interest in his fasting waned the hunger artist's cage was moved to more and more remote corners of the circus grounds till it finally ended up in a section rarely visited by either the public, the performers or the staff. Here the hunger artist could finally fast to his heart's content without being interrupted by anybody. When the circus manager rediscovered the hunger artist in his forgotten corner his first reaction was one of shock mingled with astonishment.

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“Are you still fasting”? he asked incredulously. “When are you going to stop”?

The hunger artist turned towards the manager as a dying man turns to a priest for his last rites and confession. He then earnestly asked the manager for his forgiveness. Somewhat puzzled by this request, but without taking it very seriously the manager tried to acquiesce the man with an airy gesture. “Of course we forgive you” he assured him, tapping his forehead with his finger to let the others know that he was talking to a mad man”.

But the hunger artist was determined not to be put off by this glib response. He used whatever force remained in him to make his confession heard. “I always wanted all of you to admire my fasting” he continued, and the manager, trying once more to be agreeable to a dying man assured him that everyone had indeed always admired his fasting. The hunger artist then made a last desperate effort at being understood:

“You should not admire it”, he insists, “I fasted because I could not help myself....I fasted because I could not find any food to my liking.”

Kafka writes that in the dying eyes of the man one could still read the conviction that he would continue to fast, but that this conviction was now no longer accompanied by pride.

How are we to understand this strange death scene and the even stranger confession?

And how do these in turn relate to Kafka’s own confession concerning a conspiracy between his lungs and his brain?

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We have noted that both the trapeze artist and the hunger artist lived the life of exiles from a dual cosmos. The particular mark of the trapeze artist's exile was his inability to find a place to lay his head and to rest his body, that of the hunger artist to find any food to his liking. The one failed to find a comfortable bed, the other a hospitable table.

Neither found access to home or hearth. Neither was able to submit to the ordering influence of a threshold. Neither was able to fully inhabit the earth.

As outcasts of the cosmic realm both the trapeze artist and the hunger artist initially attempted to create a substitutive, artificial domains of their own making in which they hoped to find an ultimate harbor for their exiled lives. They zealously sought to gain complete control over their own lives and as a result they became star performers. As such they proved capable of great feats of skill, persistence and courage, but they proved unable to properly honor and cultivate intersubjective thresholds.

We have remarked earlier on how entrance into the cosmos requires the sacrifice of an earlier way of life, of an entirely natural and self-evident way of belonging to the world and to others. Our weaning from the maternal breast is but a prelude to all subsequent forms of distancing and loss that is the fate of human kind to bear. Psychoanalysis has fashioned an impressive myth of weaning in which it repeats the essential elements of the Judaic and Christian myth of a fall from Paradise. We might mention here in passing that all the great creation myths that left their imprint on our civilization speak of the as made up of two worlds, the one we inhabit at present and the one we were forced to leave and cannot rejoin in life. All these myth make us collectively aware of the fact that we live in one world while necessarily being exiled from another. It is for this reason that the world of our neighbor cannot fail but to remind us of a lost paradise. We may enter

into a relationship with that lost paradise only by paradoxically renouncing our desire to claim it as our own.

A human world therefore takes necessarily the form of a dual cosmos in which two distinct realms, the one to which we have access and the one from which we have been banned, are brought together into a productive and metaphoric relationship to each other. The quality of a human life appears thus fundamentally determined by the manner in which it brings these worlds together and permits them to interact with each other.

The hunger artist had prided himself on living a solitary, self-sufficient life within a domain where he himself reigned as the sole and unique master. As we have seen, this unique domain of self was completely dominated by the vertical dimension. It made no allowance for *inclining* towards others, it did not permit *dialogue* or compromise with others. It did not permit the psychological and spiritual movement implied in *conversion*, understood here as a turning towards *another* person and towards *another* world. This isolated, purely vertical world made no time or space available to ask for or to grant forgiveness. It made no room for atonement, for righting wrongs, for retracing one's footsteps and beginning anew. Above all, it did not permit knocking on a neighbor's door, announcing one's presence, crossing a threshold and coming into the full presence of an other world and another person. The particular human qualities associated with this solitary, abstract and vertical existence are those of narcissism and pride. It was this pride that guided the lives of the trapeze artist and the hunger artist beyond all compromise and ambiguity towards their fame and fortune. It was this prideful, solitary and vertical organization of their world that permitted them to set world records. But this same prideful organization would also prevent them from establishing a hearth of their own and breaking bread with companions gathered around a hospitable table. It is for

this reason that we must conclude that neither the trapeze artist nor the hunger artist truly dwelt on earth. They rather hovered above the inhabitable earth in a pyrotechnic display that they hoped might convince others into believing that they had transcended ordinary human existence and had found access to a superior, more transparent or more accomplished way of life. It was their ability to create that illusion that was the source of their pride and the basis on which rested their fame. It was this harmful illusion that the hunger artist sought to dispel with his deathbed confession.

Kafka noted that after the confession, at the moment when he crossed the threshold between life and death the hunger artist's dimming eyes still retained: "the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was continuing to fast"

His confession broke through the vertical wall the artist had erected to maintain the illusion of a strictly unitary and universal world. That confession constituted an ultimate *turning* and *inclining* towards his neighbors, and as such it represented the hunger artist's acceptance of the human condition. That confession was the artist's knocking on a door. It was the announcement of his true presence and the moment of his finding access to an inhabitable world.

We note here that the hunger artist began to confess his culpability at the same point where the cannibalistic sons in Freud's myth began to express their guilt (*Reue*) over having murdered the primordial father. In both instances the awareness of guilt marked the place where they interrupted their precipitous flight from the human dual cosmos and began to inhabit the earth. For the cannibalistic sons it marked the spot where they turned around (L. *convertere*) to face their father for the first time. The place where the brothers *turned around* marks the spot where the hunger artist *confessed his guilt*. This

confessing should be understood here in its etymological sense as an “owning up to”, as a “mutual acknowledgement” and as a true “speaking together”. Klein, E (1971) p.157.

At this place of “turning around” and of a true “speaking together” a neighborly threshold becomes established. From that threshold emerges a dual cosmos and a world that can be inhabited in a human way.

In both instances, that of the savage brothers and that of the narcissistic hunger artist, we become witness to a fateful shift in allegiance that moves away from a prideful, egotistical universe in the direction of a human cosmos.

This shift in allegiance is also indicated by a subtle shift in the tone of the narrative. Beneath the strange irony and wry humor of the final exchanges between the circus manager and the hunger artist the reader begins to feel the stirring of a new pathos and urgency that gradually begins to pervade the entire tale. In spite of the persistent overtones of slapstick circus comedy we cannot help but feel ourselves in the presence of a genuine and intimate revelation. We witness the miraculous transformation of what at first appears to be a ridiculous mere shadow of a man, a fool lost in the vagaries of his own hermetic mind. We suddenly see this fool transformed into a seer and a saint and a revealer of subtle and unexpected truths. The tone of the narratives remains that of broad circus comedy, but it acquires a new dimension of urgent and intimate revelation. There can be no doubt but that what transpires between the hunger artist and the circus director creates the axis around which turns the entire narrative. That axis determines the direction of a shift that transforms the circus manager against his own will, and perhaps even without his knowledge, into a priest performing the sacred last rites. That shift also transforms a self-preoccupied, obsessed and alienated circus performer into a saintly figure concerned that others should not repeat his costly mistakes. But in more

general terms the story narrates the hunger artist's fateful and salutary turning away from a self-enclosed universe that admits of no outside, and his turn towards a truly human world that is ordered in all respects by the laws of the threshold.

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