

Chapter 1

Dancing with the Light

The lotus, in its salience, in its ecstasy, stands out, dominates the ground of its appearance, absorbs the mind in its presence. It is the mind thus spell-bound, thus captivated, a mind like the imprudent moth entranced by the flame, incautious, unmindful of condition or consequence, that, in our present acceptation, we shall call “consciousness” (*viññāna*). Consciousness, in this sense, is, not by contingent befallment, but trivially, by definition, un-awakened. In so far as a figural salience dominates the field of consciousness, suppressing awareness of marginal presence, to that extent awareness is diminished, attenuated; and to that extent, also, the mind drifts among evanescent dream shadows, haunted by shades of presence that whisper from the dark only to vanish. Under Wittgenstein’s pen: “*Our* life is like a dream. But in our better hours we wake up just enough to realize that we are dreaming” (Engelmann 1968, 7). In Fichte’s arresting delineation:

There is nowhere anything lasting, neither outside me, nor within me, but only incessant change. I nowhere know of any being not even my own. There is no being. *I myself* know nothing and am nothing. There are only *images*: they are the only thing which exists, and they know of themselves in the manner of images . . . I myself am only one of these images; indeed, I am not even this, but only a confused image of images. All reality is transformed into a wondrous dream, without a life which is dreamed about, and without a spirit which dreams; into dream which coheres in a dream of itself. (Fichte 1965, 89)

The title, *Buddha*, The Awakened One, is the occasion of an implicit analogy: enlightened awareness is to the flickering half-light, the drowsy play of light and darkness, presence and absence, which we here designate “consciousness,” as consciousness is, in turn, to the dream-state with its gossamer phantasms. In Hayward’s interesting gloss, *awakened* connotes “the dispelling of confusion, or the dissipation of disorder, entropy” and *one* designates the “dynamic blossoming of all potentialities in an individual . . .” (Hayward 1989, xi). And we can empathize with Bataille’s anguished lament: “Am I awake? I doubt it and I could weep” (1988, 34). The Buddha was not, in our sense, conscious. He was awakened, fully aware: *sammā sambuddhassa*.

The marked disparagement of consciousness typical of Buddhist thought would seem perplexing without its implicit contrast with awareness. It would seem, for example, merely perverse to hold that grasping after (*upācarā*) consciousness (*vijñāna*) is one of the five ways of bringing suffering (*dukkha*) down upon our heads, and that to release consciousness, to let it go, to liberate it, no longer to be lulled into a state of semi-somnambulance, is, then, to ignite the lamp of awareness (*sati*). Consciousness is the fifth of the *skandhas*, the five modes of erroneous self-identification, clinging to which is given as the summary formula for all sentient suffering. The exclusive identity, the nucleus of egocentricity and selfishness, which isolates us from others, and which conditions all antipathy and all greed, is the product of our “identification” with objectual form (*rūpa*) and with the four remaining skandhas having the intentional function of “naming” or designating (*nāma*): sensations (*vedanas*), thoughts (*samjñā*), habitual dispositions (*sanskāra*), and finally, consciousness (*vijñāna*). It would seem merely wanton, as well, to regard consciousness as the third link (*nidāna*) of the twelvefold chain of contingent becoming (*bhava-chakra*). Each link of the chain is a necessary condition for its successor, the last, in turn, a condition for the first. To break *any* link is therefore to break *every* link in the chain. Elimination of the evident ills of ignorance (*āvidyā*), craving (*trṣṇā*), and suffering (*dukkha*), spells the abolition of consciousness which, by parity, must also be regarded as an evil. Again, it is *consciousness*, not *awareness*, which is the offense.

Bataille speaks of “the disguised suffering which the astonishment at not being everything, at even having concise limits, gives us” (1988, xxxii). Oceanic assimilation, pantheistic self-identification, is not an adequate response to suffering, but merely the engorgement, the obscene distension, of the self. And so long as *ātman* retains, in our conceptual imagination, the least trace of private individuality, its identification with *Brahman* is not spared this opprobrium. The inner security and illumination which can set aside our incessant and ever-more-subtle attempts to seize upon our actions

in the act, to grasp them “red-handed,” in Husserl’s (1982) idiom, in order to provide—for ourselves—a cognitive foundation for our deluded sense of ourselves as agents evaporates in the sunlight of enlightened awareness. And “since reflexivity has dissolved, the moment wherein the human mind is ‘together’ and, thus, capable of knowing (naming) *other things* no longer exists. The human mind cannot constitute for itself the identity of other things” (Magliola 1986, 8). The dissolution, the “emptying,” of identity into difference is thus concomitant with the annulment of *nāma-rūpa*, the constellation of *skandhas* which would otherwise nourish our various modes of self-identification. The *skandhas* comprise the “concepts with which we identify ourselves as true presence . . .” (Coward 1990, 78–9), and the derepresentation of the self, its self-liquidation, leaves nothing for our egocentric grasp. An authentic Buddhist philosophy is inaugurated with the decisive suspension of self-identification, writ small or large. And “no longer to wish oneself to be everything is to put everything into question” (Bataille 1988, xxxii). Indeed, “[m]aking oneself questionable is an important element in getting under way” (Caputo 1993, 175). The decisive step beyond a merely conceptual philosophy in the direction of liberation is “to relate oneself to all ‘things’ in an *empty* relationship, i.e., in total freedom” (Streng 1967, 82). In Caputo’s scathing remark, “the sort of *philia* philosophy is—*amor intellectualis*—goes well enough with a cold heart . . .” (121). But if our heart lies with our treasure, then what, in our aberration, we most deeply cherish is what orients our benighted sense of limited, thus exclusive, identity. We identify with what we value. And if the *skandhas* comprise the various dimensions of our narrow and restricted value-orientation, then to value consciousness is to value the mere phosphorescence of awareness, to submit to the spell of apparition. Sartre is nowhere more lucid than in his clipped identification of “the being of the self: it is *value*” (1971, 92). Yet spirituality impels “the elimination of private standpoints and values” (Murti 1987, 259).

“Even the sharpest sword cannot cut itself; the finger-tips cannot be touched by the same finger-tips. Citta does not know itself” (cf. Murti 1987, 317–8). *For* the mind there *is* no mind. Or in Dōgen’s words, “Since there is no mind in me, when I hear the sound of raindrops from the eave, the raindrop is myself” (Kotoh 1987, 206). And *pace* Husserl (1982), the intentional act is not present in the act, and thus cannot enter into an attentive description of live perception. It may be that “the universal category of all [cognitional] teleology is the *wish to see*, and even the *wish to be seen*” (Trotignon 302). But the passion to exhibit oneself in self-presence is futile and blind. And the foreclosure of awareness inherent in the “wish to see” one thing as distinct from another is the dynamic of *avidyā*: “the blindness of all organismic striving” (Parsons 1976, 7). As the ancient Sthaviras main-

tained, consciousness “is like a *magic show*—because it deceives and cheats us” (Murti 1987, 224). And Mehta explains that “‘magic’ is only the name of a category employed to indicate what a blind spot prevents one from seeing . . .” (1987, 28). This “blind spot,” that which sees and cannot be seen, that which, in our anxiety, in our troubled attempts to found ourselves, reflectively to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, we seek to see, is, in a specific sense, our *self*. Reflection offers at best “a maze of speculative mirrors through which we are lured in the hope of seeing ourselves as we really are, at the source of the light by which we see ourselves” (Llewelyn 1988, 203). Yet as Sartre discerns, “the consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks” (1972, 45). There is a rent in the fabric of our reflective self-awareness. Self *as agent*, the agency of seeing, is precisely *not* self *as patient*, self as seen. The “self” which *knows* is precisely *not* the self which is *known*. To be sure, “[a] Cartesian does not see *himself* in the mirror; he sees . . . an ‘outside’ . . .” (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 170). Dews corroborates that “there is nothing *inherent* in a reflected image which reveals to the onlooker that it is his or her *own* image, and the subject cannot appeal to any third term for knowledge of identity of the two poles, since this would involve an infinite regress” (1988, 21). And to appropriate the image, to see it as an image *of oneself*, is, as Sartre insinuates, of questionable merit: “Not all who would be are Narcissus. Many who lean over the water see only a vague human figure. Genet sees himself everywhere . . .” (1964, 7). Was Genet, then, a mystic, who “sees himself in everything and all things in himself” (Puligandla 1985, xiv)? And was Sartre? Late in his life, Sartre was able to see “himself,” the “self” of consciousness, everywhere: “I find it everywhere. . . . there is no in-itself that could get away from the for-itself, nor a for-itself that should not be provided with the in-itself” (Fretz 1980, 236). But the hemorrhage which severs the medium from the matter of consciousness, the vital “no one” (awareness) from the languid “someone” (a general patterning of events of consciousness) does not import an ontological disjunction. We have no experiential warrant for positing a substantial subject, even a subject afflicted with the annoying habit of vanishing in the face of its object. In Wittgenstein’s insightful deposition, “nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye” (1974, 57). To say that the empirical ego is an impassive *Gestalt*, an object, is not to prize a putative duality of egos apart. There are not two. Anonymous awareness may found, but does not participate in Cartesian categoricity. Paradoxically, discrimination becomes nondiscrimination. Sartre approaches the Buddhist view in his conception of a “detotalized totality,” the unity of consciousness and its object, bonded by internal negation, in which consciousness is experientially absent. Still, the for-itself functions as a category of Sartre’s ontology. And awareness is transcategorial. Zen speaks of

the “Great Self” and the “small self.” But it is important to see that the Great Self is not, in any recognizable sense, *a self*—or *an* anything. To distinguish the “small” (empirical) self, the self *seen*, from the Great Self is not, then to distinguish it *from anything*. Speaking of the blind spot in our understanding of ourselves, Bataille observes, that “it is no longer the spot which loses itself in knowledge, but knowledge which loses itself in it. In this way existence closes the circle, but it couldn’t do this without including the night from which it proceeds only in order to enter it again” (1988, 110–111). Merleau-Ponty sagely signifies the supplement to visible existence, that which effects this closure, the agential self, as “one” to emphasize its ineluctable anonymity. And this chimes with Hegel’s view that “the thought in question is not *someone’s thought*, but pure thought, thought in itself. Yet the self *is* the thought; and this self is . . . itself a universal thinker *in general*, *not* a particular thinker” (Molino 1962, 7). Occhamite in its ontological sparseness, in fact ontologically abstemious in the most radical sense, Buddhism takes the *one*, the [*some*]one, to bespeak entirely too much, and replaces it by *zero*, “someone” by “no one.”

The *act* of perception is not concealed off-stage only to be surprised in its effacement in the last act of reflection. Merleau-Ponty was searchingly cognizant of this truth: “I should say that there was there a thing perceived and an openness upon this thing which the reflection has neutralized and transformed into perception-reflected-on and thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on” (1969, 38). Reflection discloses *not perception*, but *perception-reflected-on*. The modification is serious, indeed. And “[t]o reduce perception to the thought of perceiving, under the pretext that immanence alone is sure, is to take out an insurance against doubt whose premiums are more onerous than the loss for which it is to indemnify us . . .” (36). Sartre sharpens the point:

. . . the viewing of oneself by oneself, that is, the reflective consciousness which views the series of non-reflected moments of consciousness, in general merely supplies syntheses that are too simple; with parts that are ejected and crowded out, with continuities that are sharper or less sharp than in non-reflected consciousness. In brief, it provides primarily an object that is poorly constituted, that strives too much towards unity, that is too synthetic. It does not supply the truth of the non-reflected consciousness. A truth, which doesn’t exist, because there is no divine consciousness which supplies the veritable synthesis, a truth which is nothing else as the unreflected consciousness itself. However the synthesis that is brought about by the reflective consciousness always contains the defect of being a *consciousness*, a synthesis by con-

sciousness which is bent on achieving a total unity. Whereas the true unity of the non-reflected consciousness is in reality given in the non-reflected consciousness. But this unity is not itself explicit; it does not present itself as such, but we live it in the non-reflecting and in the unity, so that the reflective unity is a unity of the second degree and a unity which as such falsifies the true unity. (Fretz 1980, 231)

As Duméry observes, “philosophy always comes after life. Philosophy is a recovery of life, but it cannot be identified with life. . . . Reflection lives on concrete life” (1964, 5–6). If perception is “live,” then perception-reflected-on, bloodless, cold, its life now past, is assuredly dead. The perpetrator: reflection—a virulent parasite. We must, then, forsake “the temptation to construct perception out of the perceived, to construct our contact with the world out of what it has taught us about the world . . .” (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 156). It “dissimulates from itself its own mainspring,” constituting the world from “a notion of the world as preconstituted” (34).

Consciousness, for Buddhism, is a *skandha*—thus, in one of its luxuriant senses, a *dharmā*: “the key-word of Buddhism” (Sangharakshita 1987, 118)—and for Merleau-Ponty, equivalently, an integral feature of phenomenal display. Merleau-Ponty advances an entirely noematic characterization of consciousness. Starkly: “To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground—one cannot go back any further” (1969, 191). This formula, repeated a few pages hence—“to be conscious’ = to have a figure on a ground” (197)—identifies consciousness with the *écart*, the phenomenal estrangement, of the dominant from the recessive internal to noematic presentation. Consciousness is *phenomenal*. Though “contrast elicits depth” (Whitehead 1978, 114), there is no need to posit an agency “off-stage,” perpendicular to the phenomenal display. Consciousness is not, to press the suggestions of Sartre’s term, “positional.” It does not stand at a distantiated *position* with respect to its object. It does not open a dimension of depth across which thing communicates with eye, for depth, not to be conceived as a dimension invisible *in principle* (a notion which contravenes the fidelity to lived experience intrinsic to phenomenology), is rather “the experience of the reversibility of dimensions . . .” (Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 180). Depth is either an experiential “nothing,” a line of sight which vanishes precisely because it runs endwise from the eye “or else it is my participation in a Being without restriction, a participation primarily in the being of space beyond every [particular] point of view” (173). The primal contrast which institutes consciousness is swallowed up in a spaciousness, an enviroing emptiness, which, though not removed from the figural object, remains, nonetheless, “the means the things have to remain distinct, to

remain things, while not being what I look at at present” (Merleau-Ponty 1969, 219).

If consciousness is, then, phenomenal, it is so, not for consciousness itself, nor for a transcendently reflecting “ego” situated at some remove from the plane of phenomenal display, nor even, in a Sartrean vein, as the interior coloration of nonpositional interiority. The phenomenologies of the West habitually overlook the distinction between consciousness (*vijñāna*) and awareness (*sati*). The “distinction” is itself deeply problematic, since awareness, like an ideally flawless mirror, has no mark. Indeed, the Buddha depicts *nirvāṇa* as a “consciousness, without a distinguishing mark, infinite and shining everywhere . . .” (cf. Loy 1988, 213). Prescinding from empirical imperfections—the tint or glare of the glass, bubbles and lesions in the tain—the mirror (a gerund, not a nominative, the event of mirroring, not an objectivated melange of sensory presences) is devoid of intrinsic phenomenal attributes, reflecting spontaneously (better: *being* a spontaneous reflecting), without attachment or aversion, and without distortion, whatever stands before it. And if awareness is thus entirely signless, it cannot be conceived as “positional” or intentional, distantiated with respect to its object. In the query of Niu-T’ou Fa-Yung (594–657 C.E.), “[w]hen there is an image occupying a mirror-mind, where can you find mind?” (cf. Chang 1971, 21). And being devoid of intrinsic quality, it cannot, except from a position ostensibly *external* to both, be conceived as distinct from its object. The anonymity and phenomenal evanescence which Sartre claims for consciousness we reserve for awareness. Awareness cannot accommodate an external vantage point. Being devoid of intrinsic determinations, nothing distinguishes awareness from its object. And the “tension” of in[tension]ality is dissolved. The “object,” as that which is hurled (*jectus*) in the face of (*ob-*) subjectivity relinquishes its objectivity. Merleau-Ponty regards as “the total philosophical error” the deluded assumption that “the visible is an *objective* presence . . .” (1969, 258). And this supposition is undermined in the lovely verse of Bunan (1602–1676 C.E.):

The moon’s the same old moon,
The flowers exactly as they were,
Yet I’ve become the thingness
Of all the things I see! (cf. Stryk and Takash 1963, 15)

And though not to be identified with it—awareness is not a relatum or an identical—the awareness of phenomenal consciousness is nonetheless non-different.

Sartre discerned that “interiority seen from the outside” is afflicted with indistinctness—the intrinsic phenomenal characteristic of the in-itself—or

rather, that “indistinctness is the degraded projection of interiority” (1972, 85). In our present acception, consciousness (contradistinguished from awareness) is purely phenomenal, and thus has no “inside.” In Hegel’s view, “consciousness . . . suffers violence at its own hands . . .” (Heidegger 1970, 17). “Sciousness” (*scientia*), seeing, is accompanied by (*con-*) the perpetually failed attempt to be seen, to secure “itself” as a phenomenal presence. But the presentation of its “itself” can only displace its live functioning. Knowing-with—[con]sciousness—is actually a knowing-against: [contra]-sciousness. Granting, with Sartre, that consciousness gives itself to reflection as “an interiority closed upon itself” (1972, 84), its concealed inwardness is nonetheless merely phenomenal. It is not the manifestation or “projection” of something hidden, something deep and essential, something substantial and real. It is pure “show” (*Schau*), completely and utterly exposed. It is pristine exteriority with nothing hidden. In its “showing” of itself to awareness—even its showing of itself as a deeper reality cloaked in outer manifestation—it is not re/vealed. There is no mysterious presence behind the veil which then stands forth denuded. “We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn . . .” (Scharfstein 1993, 37). If it is “indistinct,” it does not thus conceal within this penumbra a being of pure crystal.

Were consciousness essentially crystalline, the grime of its sullied exterior would be adventitious. Sartre sees that a crystalline consciousness befouled by manifest indistinctness is a “contradictory composite” since “an absolute interiority never has an outside” (1972, 84). Tsung-mi (780–841 C.E.) draws a similar inference.

The mind . . . is like a crystal ball with no colour of its own. It is pure and perfect as it is. But as soon as it confronts the outside world it takes on all colours and forms of differentiation. This differentiation is in the outside world, and the mind, left to itself shows no change of any character. Now suppose the ball to be placed against something altogether contrary to itself, and so become a dark-coloured ball. However pure it may have been before, it is now a dark-coloured ball, and this colour is seen as belonging from the first to the nature of the ball. When shown thus to ignorant people they will at once conclude that the ball is foul, and will not be easily convinced of its essential purity. (cf. Suzuki 1981, 17)

My earlier work, *Mind as Mirror and the Mirroring of Mind* (Laycock 1994), criticized the phenomenologies of the West for abandoning presuppositionless insight and succumbing to a “metaphysics of experience” exactly by making the decision which Tsung-mi demands. Do we have here qualitative pervasion or unsullied openness to quality? Is consciousness merely transluc-

cent, retaining thus a certain phantom opacity available to reflective inspection or is it the case, in words which bespeak the transparentist strand of Sartre's early thought, that "[a]ll is clear and lucid in consciousness . . ." (1972, 40), that consciousness "is all lightness, all translucence" (42), and that the least hint of opacity "would divide consciousness . . . would slide into every consciousness like an opaque blade" would "tear consciousness from itself," and would thus be "the death of consciousness" (40)? In reflection, is there "something"—however rarified, ectoplasmic—to *see* or is it rather the case that to *see* consciousness at all is precisely to *see through* it, the leveraged surmountings which we call "reflection" thus collapsing immediately into prereflective *naïveté*. To decide the issue one way or the other is to surpass experience toward presupposition, to abandon phenomenology for metaphysics. And "the distinction between experience and reason is not given in experience or reason itself" (Puligandla 1985, 17). Phenomenological rigor binds us to the recognition that qualitative pervasion is phenomenally indistinguishable from openness to quality, a crystal intrinsically befouled is indistinguishable from pure colorless crystal offering no impedance to the darkness which it transmits.

We cannot—*qua* phenomenologists—come to Tsung-mi's decision. But then it was not as a phenomenologist, but as one who would whisper "the interrogative word of adoration in the ear of . . . the Abyss," as one, that is, whose childlike wonder was granted the response of presencing, that Tsung-mi himself came to this decision. Lines from Hölderlin's "Vom Abgrund nemlich . . ." bespeak a similar commitment:

. . . my heart becomes
 undeceiving crystal by which
 the light is tested . . . (cf. Fóti 1992, 60)

Without abandoning my earlier insistence on phenomenological rectitude, I wish here to salute the sagacity of ontological abandon. Transparentism, the wisdom of Tsung-mi's resolve, and of Hölderlin's, is not that of wariness, a reticence to transgress the limits of the legitimately given, but is rather transformative. It is not that awareness offers itself to an external regard, that it can be properly thematized, characterized, and distinguished from the dark presence which would otherwise naively be absorbed into its very being that Tsung-mi's transparentism is of import. For, like Sartre's consciousness, it strictly has no outside. It is rather that this way lies liberation; this way lies detachment (*virāga*); this way lies releasement (*Gelassenheit*), which, in Levin's eloquent depiction,

. . . calls for a gaze which is relaxed, playful, gentle, caring; a gaze which moves freely, and with good feeling; a gaze which is

alive with awareness; a gaze at peace with itself, not moved, at the deepest level of its motivation, by anxiety, phobia, defensiveness and aggression; a gaze which resists falling into patterns of seeing that are rigid, dogmatic, prejudiced, and stereotyping; a gaze which moves into the world bringing with it peace and respect, because it is rooted in, and issues from, a place of integrity and deep self-respect. (1988, 238)

As color pervades the crystal, so, in moments of captivation and clinging, the ghostly presence, the “indistinctness,” of consciousness pervades awareness. In our delusion, consciousness seems, not thematic, but environmental, present as an enveloping mist, spectral, diffuse. Its diffuseness is given as a quality of awareness: we have, it seems, an indistinct awareness of the distinct, not a lucid awareness of the obscure. Immersed in *māyā*, it would seem, then, that *this* is the way the world is: the world’s dough is cut into a thousand cookies—cookie-trees, cookie-houses, cookie-women and cookie-men—each not only distinct but distinctive, demanding recognition as separate, isolated, exclusive, repudiating continuity with others in virtue of a mere gap, an interstice, a “nothingness,” the mere incision of our cookie-cutter, figure-ground consciousness. And it seems that *this* is the way we are: selective, grasping, attached, only diffusely aware. But this is only seeming. It is not that seeming argues in any way with being, for suffusion and openness are not only compatible, but phenomenologically indistinguishable. Both are authentic “seemings.” Tsung-mi has not somehow plucked the reality from behind the appearance. He has learned to enjoy the freedom afforded by the seeming of openness, a seeming which expels consciousness from awareness, permitting both the flowering forth of distinct phenomena (including consciousness) in all their distinctive detail and the wariness which guards the postulation of existence, both suchness and emptiness, and, at a higher level, both ontological wonder and phenomenological interrogation.

But this is not the end of our journey. For the mere isolation of the pure crystal of awareness easily degenerates into the cult of purity. Hui-neng, offering a “critique of pure purity” (Caputo 1993, 65), admonished his disciples “neither to cling to the notion of a mind, nor to cling to the notion of purity . . . for these are not our meditation” (Suzuki 1981, 27). A more insidious snare is laid for those who, in even the most subtle way, objectify awareness: “Purity has no form, but, nonetheless, some people try to postulate the form of purity and consider this to be Ch’an practice. People who hold this view obstruct their own original natures and end up by being bound to purity” (Yampolsky 1967, 139–40). Hui-neng regards as a “confused notion” the assumption that “the greatest achievement is to sit quietly

with an emptied mind, where not a thought is to be conceived” (Suzuki 1981 26–7). And we have Nāgārjuna’s dialectical corroboration:

We provisionally assert that impurity cannot exist without being mutually dependent on purity and that, in turn, purity exists only as related to impurity. Therefore, purity per se is not possible.

We provisionally assert that purity cannot exist without being mutually dependent on impurity and that, in turn, impurity exists only as related to purity. Therefore, impurity per se does not exist. (1995,10–11; Inada 1970, 139)

Thus, while liberation pursues the seeming of openness—the expulsion of consciousness and its phenomena from awareness—bondage paradoxically pursues this very divergence. For distinction objectifies the distinguished. Liberation is not, then, as in the classical Sāṃkhya theory, the simple isolation of *purusa*. Though “[t]he mind . . . is pure and perfect as it is,” its ostensible segregation from quality is immediately equivalent to the abolition of its crystalline transparency, and thus its very *being* as pure crystal. It “is” as that which can *seem* a beclouded discernment of the cloudless and can equally *seem* a pellucid discernment of the clouds.

What Merleau-Ponty’s abstract, if also perspicacious, delineation of consciousness as saliency, the emergence of figure upon ground, leaves tacit, or incompletely expressed, is the asymmetry, the vectoriality, of consciousness. Consciousness is absorbed in its figural object in a way which, to a greater or lesser extent, exiles the background. And to the precise degree of this exclusion, the figure cannot be seen *as* horizontally informed, *as* relevantly similar to other objects of the same type, or *as* an exemplification of the same form, structure or quality. And in Wittgenstein’s depiction, the ground also becomes “mysterious.” “Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has meaning” (1980, 10e). “*Māyā* is inexpressible, because language has its basis in it” (Puligandla 1985, 90). Consciousness may be the *écart* by which the dominant is detached from the recessive—or rather, the event whereby this very discrimination is instituted—but in its enactment, it is the figure which dominates the scene, steals the show. Saliency effaces itself before the salient, prominence before the prominent. In Heidegger’s startling formulation, “[c]onsciousness’ is violence done against itself . . .” (1970, 17). The *écart* has no “self” to offer. In its functioning, it “itself” has evaporated. But this does not prevent the attempt or mitigate its futility. [Con]sciousness is the perpetual failure to grasp itself, to stand itself upon itself, to be unto itself its own pedestal, its own support, its own buttress, and illustrates that “heteronomic difference”

that “loves invisibility, infinite recesses, recessed infinity . . . It loves what cannot make a show at all, what is embarrassed at its impoverished appearance. It is taciturn, sincere, with a bowed head, without dissemblance, *honnête*” (Caputo 1993, 61).

As argued in *Mind as Mirror* (Laycock 1994), the standpoint of engaged awareness is indifferent to the (quasi-) realist construal that, though inaccessible in the immediacy of the event, nonetheless, *there are* horizontal determinants of figural saliency; that, though evanescent, there nonetheless *is* an *écart* which wrenches figure from ground; and that, starkly, though awareness nowhere appears in the appearing of the world, it nonetheless *exists*. The standpoint of awareness is equally indifferent to the (quasi-) idealist supposition that “what you see is what you get”; that if horizontal determination is unavailable to experience, it is simply not “there”; and that, with evident paradox, awareness, which annuls its “own” presence in favor of the world, *does not exist*. For Heidegger, *Dasein* (being-on-the-scene) is exactly that being for which its own being is in question. Awareness, on the contrary, is exactly that for which, in the immediacy of its enactment, there is, and can be, no question of its own existence or non-existence. The ontological questions put to it are not its own. And it cannot, for this reason, be charged with *naïveté*. It would rather be naive to expect the question to have any significance for engaged awareness, and *a fortiori* it would be absurd to await a determinate answer. We would seem to violate phenomenological strictures (and good sense) by insisting upon the existence of that which, in principle, cannot appear, that for which we could have no evidence and no warrant. And we would seem to transgress logical cogency, also, by first assuming an intrinsically self-effacing awareness only to repudiate its existence on the grounds of this very self-effacement. But there is a breach between the horns. Buddhist momentarism familiarizes us with evanescence, that for which *to be* is precisely to *cease* to be. And Sartrean ontology habituates a conception of consciousness for which *to be* is to be *nothing* at all. Awareness is precisely that which an ontological survey of the world cannot disclose, that which cannot appear in any appearing, that which has no “self” to offer, for its *self* is its very selflessness. For Sartre, however, the for-itself submits to “the absolute law of consciousness for which no distinction is possible between appearance and being . . .” (1972, 63). It is the “identity of appearance and existence” (1971, 17). If this meant that its being is the very appearing *of the world*, we would have no quarrel. But it is clear that consciousness “is pure ‘appearance’ in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which it [i.e., consciousness] appears” (17). Yet Sartre lapses here into inconsonance. Sartrean consciousness, a descendent of Descartes’ conception, is also heir to Fichte’s profession that “there is a consciousness in which the subjective and the objective are in no

way to be separated, but are absolutely one and the same” (1975, 107). For Buddhism, consciousness, like every other phenomenon (*dharma*), is “empty” (*śūnya*). To be is to defer its own being, its own-being (*svabhāvatā*), to its conditions. Its “self” is drained away only to reappear among the manifold factors which sustain its being. To be is not only to be conditioned, but, reflexively, to exist as an immediate reflux. Like the moon which borrows its light from the sun, and is visible only in virtue of the reflex of solar illumination which it occasions, consciousness is exactly the reversal, the return, of being to that which sustains it in being. There is nothing “more” to consciousness than this ontological arc, the flux and reflux of being. Awareness, on the other hand, is profoundly anti-Berkeleyan in the sense that, for it, *to be* is exactly *not* to appear. Authentic subjectivity is comprised exactly in its being in no way objective. To *be* itself is precisely to *have* no self. “Vision, as Merleau-Ponty attests, “is the means given me for being absent from myself . . .” (1964a, 186). “I am,” he writes, “a self-presence that is an absence from self” (1969, 250). Pressing this claim into its most radical construal, this represents the searching insight of Buddhist wisdom.

In a qualified sense, Sartre recognizes worldly being, being-in-itself, and its objectual modes as supporting consciousness, the privation of being, in its being. The in-itself “is the foundation of itself in so far as it is *already no longer* in-itself . . .” (1971, 130). Thus, to the extent that consciousness offers content either to the condescending gaze of reflection or to “itself” in its very enactment, there is “more” to consciousness than the turning point of a reversal. The “more” is ectoplasm, a density, a nebulosity, which, directly counter to Sartre’s theoretical desideratum, effects the introduction of a darkness, an obscurity, into the absolute lucidity of consciousness, lacerating consciousness “like an opaque blade.” Still, Sartre repudiates the “abrupt interpolation of an opaque element” which would divide consciousness “in the way that a knife blade cuts a piece of fruit in two . . .” (64).

Rather than effecting its unequivocal demise, the bisection of consciousness, occasioned by the blade of opacity, might stimulate a certain ontological mitosis. And though an original identity is abrogated in cellular division, nothing really dies. The introjection of obscurity would then occasion, not the abolishment, but the multiplication of consciousness. The formation of an interior wall constitutive of a new duality is entirely consonant with Sartre’s early view that there is nothing *in* consciousness. The two new “cells” would be as vacuous as their parent. This, at least, remains a possibility if the “opaque element” is imaged as a *blade*. If the opacity is pervasive, however, if it is conceived as positivity saturating negativity, density permeating vacuity, then consciousness—a “hole of being at the heart of Being” (1971, 786)—would be swamped and destroyed by the ectoplasmic haze which imbues it. Or else, should the “haze” permit some diffuse and inhib-

ited illumination, should consciousness be only semi-opaque, it would, of course, fail to be “all lightness,” and we would have no way to account for a limited translucence in Sartrean terms. The in-itself and for-itself do not “mix.” The latter contests the former. Speaking Foucaultian semiotics, “[w]hen the relation between sign and signified lost its transparency, man appeared as the one in whom knowledge is made possible” (Hiley 1988, 102). Semi-, quasi-, improper opacity, vaporous presence, gossamer materialization is a condition for the possibility of Sartrean ontology—and also a condition of its impossibility.

The disavowal of an intruding trenchant opacity which would render the apple of consciousness in twain appears in the context of Sartre’s theory of temporality. Opacity does not “separate prior from subsequent . . .” (1971, 64). Significantly, what *does* is “exactly *nothing*” (64). Offering an illustration from geometry, Sartre claims that “what separates . . . two curves at the very spot of their tangency is *nothing*, not even a distance . . .”—a nothingness here conceived as “pure identity” (248). And Sartre’s concordant description of nothing as “impassable” (296) suggests a curious density or solidity.

Though Sartre’s iconography suggests a ghostly fog of presence nuzzling in the open valley of consciousness, and thus the disjunction of consciousness and the fog of presence which is “itself,” it is clear that consciousness is not inhabited by a wraithlike spirituality but rather *is* its own ectoplasm. Consciousness is not haunted. It is a ghost. Nothingness *appears*. It displays itself—its *self*. And this ethereal presence is the surplus, the pale tatter of selfhood, which consciousness clutches to itself after all else has been drained away into the experienced world. If consciousness *is* its own presence to itself, however, then Sartre has decided the undecidable. *Mind as Mirror* (1994) cultivates the discernment, in Klee’s attestation, that “I cannot be caught in immanence,” (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 188) that immanent experience fissures into transcendence in virtue of two ever-ready construals: that the quality thus manifest appears *through*, and that it appears *in*, the purported immanence; that immanence is an inapprehensible opening upon apprehensible quality and that quality saturates immanence, dyes the fabric of its being. Both renderings are wholly concordant with experience, representing the modes of givenness whereby the dehiscence of immanence, its eruption into transcendence, is effected. Transcendence is the difference between seemings of the same. Both the transparentist and the translucentist views, the seeming of openness and the seeming of suffusion, stand perpetually ready to claim any item of immanence, thus conjointly infusing the difference required by transcendence. Neither view is compelled by a faithful attentiveness to experience. To subscribe to one, then, in preference to the other, is to lapse into “metaphysics” and “presupposition.” The

issue is rather undecidable. “Undecidability recognizes the wavering between the disjuncta in any either/or and the lack of a clean break (*de-cidere*) between them” (Caputo 1993, 63). Sartre with his “*maudite lucidité*” (Merleau-Ponty 1964c, 33) is incisive, cutting (*cidere*) where there is nothing to cut, upholding a clear-cut position when nothing enforces a decision in favor of one view or another.

For Sartre, “[w]hat can properly be called subjectivity is consciousness (of) consciousness” (1971, 23), the parenthesized “of” designating, not the distantiation of intentional (Sartre’s “positional”) consciousness, but the immediate, undistanced, nonpositional awareness of the intentional act as a preobjective, “environmental” presence felt at the moment of enactment like a mood, like the delicate atmospheric modulation which thrills all things at the breaking of day. In non-thetic consciousness (of) self, “the self’s awareness of itself is the denial of making itself other than what it is. When it becomes other, it is no longer the self. When the self refuses to be other—a self outside consciousness—it must be non-thetic” (Silverman 1980, 88), not a “thesis,” not the target of positional directedness, but a non-objective presence. If “intentionality is itself an answer to the question, ‘How can there be an object in itself for me?’” (Lyotard 1991b, 55), non-positional awareness is the answer to a related query: setting aside the elevated survey provided by reflection which can only reclaim a phase of our conscious life already elapsed, and which, in principle, cannot reproduce the experience as it was originally lived, how can the act of consciousness itself be experienced concurrently with its enactment? Though there are hints of a transparentist strand in Sartre’s early writing—consciousness as pure vacancy, utterly evacuated of intrinsic determination or qualitative coloring—the vacillation between a conception of consciousness as a window flung open to the world and consciousness as a distinctively tinted pane of glass seems to have stabilized around the latter conception by the writing of *Being and Nothingness* (1971). A barely sensible incandescence has infused Sartrean consciousness. This is not the indistinctness of “interiority seen from the outside”—in reflection—but the qualitative pervasion which ensures, for Sartre, that in its immediate, its most intimate, presence to itself, there is “something,” if only a diffuse and non-objectified presence, to discern. To be sure, “[a]ll reflecting consciousness is . . . in itself unreflected” (1972, 45), and is, we must add, positional. In reflection, Sartre tells us, “we are in the presence of a synthesis of two consciousnesses, one of which is consciousness *of* the other” (44). Reflection institutes a “phantom dyad,” the terms of which—reflecting and reflected consciousness—“support their two nothingnesses on each other, conjointly annihilating themselves” (1971, 241). But reciprocal “annihilation” is oddly insufficient to annihilate. For the patina of consciousness, the indistinctness of its “outside,” the

surface it displays to reflection, is indispensable. “It is necessary that the reflecting reflect *something* in order that the ensemble should not dissolve into nothing” (241). Transparentism, to the contrary, would happily witness the dissolution. Reflectively to *see* consciousness at all is to see *through* it. Reflection is indiscernible from prereflective disclosure. But for Sartre, the pale flush of interior self-presence is not the epidermis, but the life-blood of that nothingness which is consciousness. Transparentism deprives consciousness of both skin and tissue, surface and interior substance. But non-positional awareness preserves the ectoplasmic mist of presence which, while no isolable *thing*, denies a more radical sense of “nothingness” to subjectivity. Cartesian self-lucidity imports the immediate objectification of subjectivity to itself. The subject is both subject and object. (For the transparentist, it is neither.) And whatever holds, objectively, for consciousness, whatever determinate, structural truth informs it, is immediately known. To be conscious, then, is to be consciousness *of* one’s being conscious. And Sartre is prepared to grant whatever insight this rationalist deposition might harbor. After all, it would seem dissonant to announce “I am conscious of the table before me” and in the same breath rescind this report with the disclaimer, “but I am not *conscious* of being conscious of this table.” Still, what one can be in a position to *say* is not a reliable guide to truth. I can never be in a position to *say* “I am now mute,” “I am now unconscious,” “I am now asleep,” “I am now dead.” But pragmatically paradoxical pronouncements such as these may well find their fulfillment in muteness, unconsciousness, sleep and death. And though such things could never be truly *said*, they may nonetheless be *true*. Truth overflows the sayable and undermines the Cartesian (and Sartrean) assumption that whatever is true *of me* is also representable *by me* to myself. The Sartrean position that “the imagination is the locus of possibility . . .” (Flynn 1980, 106) falters in the face of unimaginable possibilities. I may well die. But I cannot imagine *my own* death: *my* not being around to imagine anything at all. Imagination cannot, in all cases, be the engine of the possible.

Descartes did not, of course, have the conceptual resources to discriminate the self-objectification of subjectivity typical of reflection from the self-presence operative in nonreflective modes cognition which occupy themselves with the furniture of the world. And the formula for self-lucidity—to know is to know one’s knowing—falls straightaway into *aporia*. For applied without restriction, Cartesian self-lucidity would generate a runaway regress of knowings of knowings of knowings . . . without end. And we would be compelled to affirm “the necessity of an infinite regress (*idea ideae ideae*, etc.) . . .” which Sartre considers “absurd” (1971, 12). Otherwise, should the series simply terminate at a primal event of knowing—a “non-self-conscious reflection”—“the totality of the phenomenon falls into the unknown”

(12). It is “ectoplasm” which delivers Sartre from the horns of the dilemma. For him, to be conscious is to be a *nonpositional* consciousness of our *positional* consciousness of the world. Sartre claims that “if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious—which is absurd” (11). But one wonders just where the absurdity lies. We could not succeed in knowing the first thing were this to attend the completion of an incompletable succession of knowings, each a necessary condition for the iteration that follows. To be impaled on this horn of the dilemma would be fatal. But it is not clear just what brief can be brought to bear against a “consciousness ignorant of itself.” Positional consciousness devotes itself to the foreground, to the ecstatic burst of saliency which captivates its at/tention, its tension-in-presence. Positional consciousness discloses the ex/sistent, that which “stands out,” which dominates, and with the free consent of subjectivity, renders subjectivity captive. In its at/tention to prominence, positional consciousness is actively passive, cooperating in its own enthrallment. Nonpositional consciousness is a diffuse awareness of the recessive. If positional consciousness is spellbound by exfoliating saliency, nonpositional consciousness is an atmospheric sensitivity to the ground from which the blossom springs. Nonpositional consciousness is background awareness. To say, then, that subjectivity is (nonpositional) consciousness (of) consciousness, that, for consciousness, being and nonpositional self-presence are identical, is to confine Sartre’s “ectoplasm” to the background. The act “itself” stands back. Its object stands forth. But the “self” of self-presence, though deprived of objectivity, nonetheless announces itself in the indiscriminate haze which haunts the background. Loy speaks disparagingly of “Husserl’s attempt to analyze that horizon phenomenologically, which . . . would amount to bringing that background into the foreground, a feat no less extraordinary than levitating by pulling on one’s shoelaces” (1988, 86). And the parity suggests itself immediately. Phenomenological reflection accords to nonpositional consciousness its proper province only if this dim domain is flooded with the harsh, unremitting light of focal investigation. And this, in turn, is possible only by a transformation of background into foreground. To be warranted phenomenologically, ectoplasmic self-presence would have to be distilled from the background and objectified. And contrary to Sartre’s intention, this would leave an unconscious consciousness. To say that consciousness is “unconscious,” however, is to deprive it, not of its world, but of itself. “Consciousness” expresses the fact that *there is* a world. “Unconsciousness” expresses the fact that *there being a world* does not itself appear in the world. Transparentism affirms “the paradox that to grasp the unconscious is, at the

same time, to fail to grasp it” (Dews 1988, 84). The very *being* of consciousness is a deferring of presence. And Merleau-Ponty speaks congruently of the unconscious as “an original of the *elsewhere*, a *Selbst* that is an Other . . .” (1969, 254). It is not, then, “a *positive that is elsewhere*,” but rather, “a true negative” (254). Consciousness is *nothing but* the presence of its object. It has no self, no self-presence. There is nothing of consciousness to be apprehended but the *being-known* (*Bewusstsein*) of its object.

Transparentism, the seeming of openness, is an optional modality within the dyad of construals which fractures the integrity of all purported immanence, a “blade,” of sorts, which divides every consciousness, every pellicle of immanence, and reverses the fission of being and appearing. Phenomenologically, it carries no greater warrant than the alternative seeming which would restore to consciousness its “self,” the subtle presence whereby consciousness “itself” is given in the giving of the world. At the same time, however, transparentism is an inescapable entailment of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of consciousness. To deny transparentism is thereby to deny the universal scope of emptiness. And it is thus evident that this conception, central and indispensable to the Buddhist outlook, is, from a phenomenological point of view, undecidably optional. Buddhism, then, is undecidably optional. In Hui-neng’s counsel, “separate yourselves from views” (Yampolsky 1967, 136). And we might add: “Even Buddhism.” “Ch’an takes no sides” (Chang 1971, 11). Zen (and Buddhism more generally) does not insist upon “Buddhist” tenets or dogmas. There *are* none. Empty, like all other phenomena, Buddhism does not insist upon “itself.” The Buddha was not “Buddhist.” And “‘emptiness’ is not a viewpoint . . .” (Streng 1967, 90), but a detonation, the explosion of viewpoints. “Right” (*sammā*) view, the primal factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, is not a position or a theory which faithfully mirrors the reality which it confronts. There is no need for the reduplication which even the most accurate conceptual mapping can provide when the landscape of reality is present. Rather, a viewing which is *sammā* (etymological ancestor of our “same”) is even, balanced, poised between alternatives. “Right” viewing is free from the instability which would pitch one sideways into one theoretical commitment or another. In this instance, Buddhism aligns itself with Rorty’s criticism of “edifying” philosophy in “decry[ing] the very notion of having a view” (1979, 371). Thus, in the teaching of Huang-Po, “[t]he fundamental dharma of the dharma is that there are no dharmas, yet that this dharma of no-dharma is in itself a dharma; and now that the no-dharma dharma has been transmitted, how can the dharma of the dharma be a dharma?” (Blofeld 1958, 64–5). Sprung remarks that the Middle Way, the way of equilibrium, is “the end of socratizing . . .” (1978 136). In fact, to the extent that Socratic wisdom represents an authentic introspective knowing of un-

knowing, to the extent that the expression of this wisdom is more than ironic posturing, and to the extent that the Socratic *elenchus* is not merely an “apogogic device” (Inada 1970, 9), the negation of one view presuming the affirmation of its negate, “socratizing” may, with some qualification, be regarded as a continuation in spirit of the Middle Way. In the declaration of Fa-yen Wên-I (885–958 C.E.), “[n]ot knowing most closely approaches the Truth” (Chang, 239). Aside from the scant handful of teachings which exceeded the common convictions of his day (*para/doxa*), Socrates left us little but questions. And Buddhism teaches that “[p]erfect wisdom . . . does not assert a teaching; the only ‘answer’ one can receive from wisdom (*prajñā*) is silence” (Streng 1967, 89)—a conception entirely removed from that of Rorty for whom wisdom consists in “the ability to sustain a conversation” (377–8). “Primeval wisdom” is not, for Buddhism, merely “the counter-image of ‘primeval stupidity’ ” (Gadamer 1984, 243), but is the nondiscriminative intuition which plumbs infinitely deeper than the distinction between wisdom and stupidity. The volubility exhibited in Socrates’ love of disputation, no less than the immensity of the corpus of Buddhist scriptures, may simply illustrate the “freedom from the alternatives of words or silence” (Chang, 90) of which the Zen tradition speaks.

But if the seeming of openness is a pure *phenomenological* option—or better, if the tension between transparentism and translucentism is phenomenologically irresolvable—it nonetheless conspires with its alternative to establish an *ontology* of emptiness. An ostensible item of immanence, an event of consciousness, as our prime example, can always be *seen* as pellucid, vacuous, a pure revelation of the world which exhausts “itself” in the world it reveals. Its “self-presence” would thus be extruded from consciousness and would belong, with all else, to the world. Consciousness would thus become awareness (*sati*). For transparentism, “self-presence” is not the presence of consciousness “itself,” but a peculiar modality of transcendence. At the same time, and with no lapse of faithfulness to experience, self-presence can be *seen* as immanent to consciousness. Neither seeming represents the way things *are*. Neither appearance coincides with the reality. Neither is phenomenologically *true*. The “truth” rather lies in the absence of truth: the unrestricted failure of fusion which perpetually disjoins the being and the appearing of consciousness. *Pace* Sartre (and Husserl), consciousness cannot be immanent. It cannot simply *be* as it appears, for it appears, always, in two entirely incompatible ways. And the consequent transcendence of consciousness is displayed in its perpetual remission of self-presence to the world which conditions it. Phenomenology does not witness the rupture of immanence, for nothing on the part of experience compels transparentism as opposed to translucentism. Phenomenology rather assumes the transcendence of consciousness as a (quasi-transcendental) condition of the faithful-

ness of its investigation. The avowal of one seeming in preference to the other is a fall from phenomenological grace, an unbalanced plunge into “metaphysics.” And it is our stereoscopic ability to see—indifferently, undecidably—from both points of view, and to do so without attachment, without the assumption that one or the other is *true*, that the “truth” of their common default of truth is attested. In this way, then, a rigorous and conscientious phenomenology, a phenomenology which refuses to posit more than is given, entails an ontology of universal transcendence, an ontology of emptiness.

To be sure, the two seemings are not enframed by a relativism of respect. They are not equally, though equivocally, valid. It is not that each is true from its own vantage point. If “[r]elativism is the absence of truth conditions” (Magliola 1986, 81), the Buddhist rejoinder is that nothing—not even the relative truth of our common experience (*samvṛti*)—is without condition, that emptiness therefore revokes relativism. Buddhism takes to heart Davidson’s dismissal of the duality of conceptual scheme and its content. Buddhist antisubstantialism denies an underlying invariant which, according to this “third dogma” of empiricism, would sub-stand the profusion of constructions which we place on it. Dogmatism, scepticism and relativism are equally invested in the scheme/content distinction, differing primarily in their distinctive apportionment of truth and falsity, and in their views of the warrantability of this allocation, to the multiplicity of schemes. There is a trivial sense in which the abolition of scheme/content dualism would, as Davidson believes, reestablish “unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false” (1973–74, 20). In Danto’s explication of Nietzschean perspectivism,

There is no way the world really is in contrast with our modes of interpreting it. There are *only* rival interpretations . . . And accordingly no *world in itself* apart from some interpretation . . . We cannot even speak of these interpretations as “distorting” reality, for there is nothing that counts as a reality, for there is nothing that counts as a veridical interpretation relative to which a given interpretation could distort: or *every* interpretation is a distortion, except that there *is* nothing for it to be a distortion of. (1965, 76–7)

Nothing is true or false independent of a given construal. Veridicality is intrinsic to the conceptual framework. And we must inquire, with Uchiyama Roshi, “[t]hen where is the absolute reality that departs completely from our point of view as a yardstick?” (1988, 191). Or in the words of Montaigne, “[t]o judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we should

need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument we need a demonstration, an instrument: thus we are in a circle” (1965, 454). As Puligandla comments, “neither the physical nor the mental comes to us with labels such as ‘real,’ ‘illusory,’ or ‘unreal’” (1985, 41). We have “unmediated touch” with the denizens of our world and their “antics” because there is no gap between scheme and content, no room for mediation, nothing to be mediated separable from our categorial scheme. It is, then, the indissoluble unit comprised of schematized content, objects *as* given, *as* conceptually informed—not a separable order of “familiar objects,” an independent *Inhalt* awaiting *Auffassung*, a disjoinable hyletic stratum attending morphic transmutation—which is the measure of verity. “[N]othing exists unless I give it a form” (Lispector 1988, 6). And it is misleading to import the idiom of the “third dogma” in speaking of objects which *make* our opinions true or false. The suggestion, if not the implication, of this language is that there exists a domain of independent entities to which our constructions either con[form] or fail to con[form], and that conformity, correspondence, *adequatio intellectus et res*, is truth. But this assumes that, detached from our conceptual scheme, the object *has* a form. And we would have no way of knowing this, no “yardstick,” independent of a conceptual scheme. If the “absence of truth conditions” implies that there is nothing—no invariant and variously interpretable substratum—beyond our construals which could, in this sense, *make* our construals true, then the absence of truth conditions will simply undermine relativism, and with it dogmatism and scepticism as well.

The two seemings, transparentism and translucentism, are not, then, equally *true*, though they assuredly enjoy a certain minimal “adequacy”: they do not, and cannot, conflict with the experience which they construe. Experience welcomes both—not because they in any way con[form], but because they do not de[form]. Or rather, because mind is “pure as the Void, without form” (Chang 1971, 97), and nothing con[forms] to the formless. The formless is the womb of form, the ambience, the medium, in which form arises and into which it dissolves. In Pruffer’s provocative declamation, the matrix (derivative of *māter*, mother) “is by anticipation the matrix of the different, but as matrix it itself is different from them by its indifference” (1973, 226). We must, however, distinguish between the formless, the indifferent, and *concept* of formlessness. Within our conceptual economy, the term, “formless,” participates in bipolar contrast with “formed,” and differs from the formed in its determinate absence of form. Absence of form is its *differentium*. Like the term “inconceivable,” “formless” functions within the lacework of our conceptuality as a quiet, but ruthlessly effective, solvent: the *concept* of inconceivability, the *form* of the formless. At the heart of our conceptual system there pulses the dark and boiling blood of contradiction,

a rebellion of reason, a surdity which threatens to infect the entire organism. The *concept* of the inconceivable features that which is devoid, in principle, of an inner contest of principles, that which is entirely coherent and incapable coming into conflict. Ironically, this very concept—because it is a concept—menaces the overall consistency of our conceptual framework. But the formless (as distinguished from the *concept* of formlessness), the indifferent (distinguished from the *concept* of indifference) is devoid of any attribute which could differentiate it from the formed, the differentiated. The indifferent is *not* different from the differents. It is indifferent to the differents—but not in virtue of the quality of indifference. And by application, we see that self-effacing (self-deferring) consciousness is *not different* from the dyad of seemings which respectively posit the transcendence and the immanence of qualitative presence.

But as “minimal adequation”—mere absence of friction—is clearly not truth, the failure of complete con[form]ation is not (exactly) falsehood. Only in the ethereal realm of floating abstraction, “the land where there are all and only Capitals, . . . the world where German nouns come true . . .” (Caputo 1993, 33), does representation mirror reality with perfect adequacy, and then not without paradox. Though demurring from Royce’s conclusion, we might nonetheless consider his provocative illustration:

let us suppose . . . that a portion of the surface of England is very precisely levelled and smoothed, and is then devoted to the production of our precise map of England . . . the map, in order to be complete, according to the rule given, will have to contain, as a part of itself, a representation of its own contour and contents. In order that this representation should be constructed, the representation itself will have to contain once more, as a part of itself, a representation of its own contour and contents; and this representation, in order to be exact, will have once more to contain an image of itself; and so on without limit. (1976, 504–5)

A “self-representational system” leads immediately to the *aporia* of infinite regress—not, as Royce supposed, to the endlessly iterative cognitive wealth of the Absolute. Assuming perfect adequacy, a map could not *map* without mapping “itself.” And this “self,” the impress of its “own” presence upon the terrain, could not be mapped without, once again, mapping “itself.” And thus, regressively, without limit. The Buddhist revocation of the self and of the “itself” requires the abandonment of perfect conceptual adequacy. And Royce unwittingly provides the argument. The “self” represented always suffers a diminution of presence. Something is always lost. In the optical analogue, that of the *mise-en-abîme* generated by the confrontation of two

mirrors, the loss is in the extent and distinctness of the image. The bottomless iteration of images within images . . . converges to a vanishing point. And phenomenologically, the singularity which appears to lure all concentric, conformal forms into “itself” is more evident than the infinity of their iteration. Curiously, the vanishing of images, their absorption and disappearance at the infinitesimal, is a genuine phenomenon. We “witness” the site of this extraordinary arrested implosion as a point of reference which is not “there.” And though, in virtue of these incessant references, we can speak of the vanishing point “itself,” it has no self, no presence, at all. Its “presence” is the occasion of a relinquishment of presence. It is a present absence. Yet this “presence,” which can be thought as evanescence, is more clearly manifest by far than the positive infinity of inclusions which it devours. The eye does, of course, catch the *“und so weiter”* of nested images. But the center dominates the scene to the extent that the infinity of concentricities seems a mere inference. And from a phenomenological point of view, the interminable regression of images is an airy fabrication wafting in logical space. The vanishing is apodictic. The interminability of the regression is merely presumptive.

Our reticular system of conceptual representations suffers a similar diminution, there is always something “excluded.” And as Puligandla discerns, there is always a “tension between the included and the excluded” which “sustains the framework.” Thus, “[r]emove the tension by total inclusion or total exclusion, and there can be no categorial framework” (1985, 32). The grand compendium of all possible concepts constitutes a cataclysmic contradiction. This immense cacophony is not unlike the running-together of all the paints in the paint box—a horrific mess. To the degree that a conceptual scheme is internally coherent, it is unavoidably exclusive. Binary contrasts have been truncated, dissonant voices silenced. Yet the excluded is not without vengeance. And exclusion only appears to abate the force of contrast. We have spoken of the logical mutiny of the *concept* of inconceivability, the *form* of the formless, which transmit their instability to the surrounding web of concepts, causing them to tremble with inconsistency. But the more general stimulus of conceptual revolt is our misguided efforts to apply to the regal domain of the real the necessarily impoverished resources of conceptual [re]presentation. And “the breakdown of a categorial framework is testimony to the tension between the included and excluded” (Puligandla, 32). To apply to the province of presence what pertains only to one of its warring municipalities courts incongruity. To frame reality as, for example, “infinite” is to invite implicit contrast with the finite. The excluded conception of finity gains surreptitious entry through the “not” required to understand the [in]finite. The infinite is that which is *not* finite. That which is *excluded* to effect coherent attribution must now be

included to enable intelligibility. Finitude cannot, ultimately, be exiled from the conceptual scheme which frames reality as infinite. “[I]t is none other than inquiry into the included, through the instrumentality of a given categorial framework, that leads—nay, compels—the inquirer to a consideration of the excluded” (32). To perform its dual task of framing and rendering intelligible, the scheme must, then, be incoherent.

Perfect adequation is not the hallmark of truth. It is conceptually and phenomenologically impossible. And an adequation of imperfect degree is not a consummate falsehood, but at best, a relative truth. Nietzsche’s inversion of Plato is at the same time an inversion of relativism. Frozen, immutable, timeless, our conceptions are inescapably disloyal to a fluid reality. Our positions, our theories, our systems are not, then, equally true, but for Nietzsche, equally *false*. With evident paradox, the Nietzschean *truth* is that “truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are” (1980, 47), that truth is at best a vital lie. And while it may be “true” of relative truth (*samvṛti*) that “‘the true,’ ‘truth’ in the traditional metaphysical sense, is a *fixation* of an apparition” and that “it clings to a perspective” (Krell 1979, 237), that, in other words, truth is intrinsic to our outlook, this is not the case for the truth that exceeds all conceptual understanding: Absolute Truth (*paramārtha*). In Foucault’s view, “Kant’s awakening from his dogmatic slumber was just the beginning of the ‘anthropological sleep’” (Hiley 1988, 103). “Anthropological sleep” is induced by the lullaby of the *for us*, or the *for me*, the presumption, the arrogance, of position-taking. Absolute Truth is awakening (Buddha). While Absolute Truth does not swim in the bright waters of Nietzsche’s thought, there is much insight in the notion that “[t]ruthfulness is all that is left when one sees that Truth is the will-to-truth . . .” (Caputo 1993, 190). Absolute Truth is not a final answer to our deepest question, a place of final rest for our restless cognitive mind. Like truthfulness, it is more like receptivity than something received, more like openness than content. Truth, Lyotard tells us, “is not an object but a movement . . .” (1991b, 63). Absolute Truth is not an acquisition, but a loss. “There is nothing gained only something [language] to be removed” (Loy 1984, 442). In Benoit’s admonition, “[s]earch not for the truth; only cease to cherish opinions” (cf. Sohl and Carr 1970, 49).

Relativism, once again, is the absence of truth conditions—not, of course, in the sense that independent features of the landscape fail to “make” for the accuracy of the map—for there *are* no such features—but in the sense that (relative) truth is intrinsic to our outlook, and thus, that falsehood can be pronounced only from a competing vantage point. Absolute Truth (*paramārtha*) shares its formal conception with relativism: its truth is beyond condition, as also beyond conception. As Blofeld comments, in Hui-hai’s teaching, there is not “a hairsbreadth of difference” between “rel-

ativity and ultimate truth” (1972, 32). Were we to understand this term as “the common postulate of dogmatism and scepticism,” we must concur with Lyotard that “[t]here is not . . . an absolute truth” (1982, 38). But what is shared by dogmatism and scepticism is the assumption of objective, not absolute, truth. And if we think of objectivity as “the capacity on the part of investigators to set aside their own prejudices and predilections from distorting the framework from within which they produce knowledge-claims and determine their truth” (Puligandla 1985, 31), objective truth turns out to be a certain rigor, a certain discipline of self-suspension, practiced by those who share a common paradigm. And shared commitment to a relative outlook is not Absolute Truth. In response to the query, “What is the ground of Absolute Truth?” Fa-yen Wên-I replied, “If there should be a ground, it would not be Absolute Truth” (Chang 1971, 244). Absolute Truth is groundless, unconditioned. The *conception* of Absolute Truth has no conceptual content. “Truth doesn’t make sense!” (Lispector 1988, 11). “The term ‘absolute truth’ is part of the descriptive order, not part of the factual order. Like all other expressions, it is empty, but it has a peculiar relation within the system of designations. It symbolizes non-system, within the system of constructs” (Streng 1967, 84). Absolute Truth—not the conception, but the realization—is emptiness.