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From Another Psyche: The Other Consciousness of a Speculative American Mystic (The  
Life and Work of Jane Roberts)

by

Peter William Skafish

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy  
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in

Medical Anthropology

in

The Graduate Division  
of  
The University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Stefania Pandolfo, Chair

Professor Lawrence Cohen

Professor Niklaus Largier

Professor Catherine Malabou

Professor Ian Whitmarsh

Spring 2011



## Abstract

From Another Psyche: The Other Consciousness of a Speculative American Mystic (The Life and Work of Jane Roberts)

by

Peter Skafish

Joint Doctor of Philosophy with the University of California, San Francisco in Medical Anthropology

The University of California, Berkeley

Professor Stefania Pandolfo, Chair

This dissertation attempts to develop the beginnings of a new approach to understanding the significance of modes of thought marginal and/or external to those of the modern West. I call this approach an “anthropology of concepts” because it examines concepts and themes belonging to scriptural, “philosophical,” and poetic traditions as *concepts* rather than, as normally happens in anthropology, in the context of social practices, historical events, or everyday life. I also call it this because it accordingly involves the close reading and interpretation of the written or oral texts in which concepts are articulated. Concepts, when treated this way, retain their capacity to bring about novel understandings of the real, and to engender thereby theoretical perspectives not attainable through more conventional interpretive means. Such an approach may be necessary if the humanities and social sciences are to continue to hold a critical perspective on a world so enclosed that gaining any distance from its basic schemes of thought has become extremely difficult.

The present dissertation undertakes such an “anthropology of concepts” in order to elaborate what I intend to be a new theory of the psyche and consciousness. Popularly regarded as one of the founders of the New Age spirituality of the United States, Jane Roberts (1925-1984) was a “channel” (a kind of spirit medium) and visionary mystic who published in the 1960’s and 1970’s over twenty books that she understood to have been dictated or written through her by different spiritual beings, including one she called “Seth.” Although these texts were crucial to the popularization of Western occult ideas about reincarnation, magic, and health that were at the heart of the New Age, Roberts’s intellectual curiosity and background as an author of science fiction give her writings a speculative, intellectually reflexive, and even manifestly ontological tone that is reminiscent of certain mystical thinkers and that sets them apart from popular religious discourse.

My engagement with Roberts’ writings focuses, first of all, on the concepts she and her cohort of personalities articulated in the course of addressing what was for her the most pressing question raised by the decades she spent channeling: how could her experience during her trances of being herself and another self in the same instant of time be possible? Her answer was that such an experience—what she called “other-consciousness”—occurs not through language but when the subject sees itself in the non-sensory, mental images of dreams and the imagination. She was right in the sense that such images, as Jean-Paul Sartre makes clear in *Psychology of the Imagination*, allow two aesthetic figures or persons to appear as one. My argument is that her claim is significant for showing, surprisingly enough, that

contrary to what French philosophy claimed for decades, the other can be brought into and made part of consciousness without being appropriated and consciousness therefore takes a radically altered form. The baseline consciousness of oneself, that is, changes from apperception to a consciousness of oneself as both oneself and another—and even of oneself as a plurality of selves.

To make this point, I read concurrently with Jane Roberts' texts the work of Deleuze, showing that she raised in her own fashion some of the same questions about being, time, and the subject as he did, but that the strange context in which she thought led her to furnish significantly different—and now for us, novel—responses to them. Given that a subject that would be at once itself and another would also be both what it actually is and what it otherwise only could have been, I furthermore show how Roberts' work allows one to rethink the Deleuzian (and by implication deconstructive) understandings of the categories of actuality and possibility and another concept—time—to which they are integrally tied. The fact that her writings provide a basis for recasting the thought of such a comprehensive philosopher on matters this fundamental is an indication, I think, of the broad value an anthropology of concepts could hold for humanistic research.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The debts incurred in the course of thinking and writing are incalculable, but the people to whom one owes them are not unidentifiable—especially when they have become an integral aspect of one’s own (necessarily borrowed) consciousness. I would like to thank Lawrence Cohen for the wisdom, breadth of knowledge, and graceful criticism he offered while engaging this work and through the different phases of my intellectual development; Niklaus Largier, for showing interest in my research and for taking it seriously as a project on religion; and Ian Whitmarsh, for reading and commenting in an insightful fashion on a late version of this manuscript.

To Catherine Malabou, I owe first of all the chance she gave a project as heterodox and as at first inchoate as mine; to have seen, as a philosopher, philosophical possibility in such a strange location required a balance of openness and rigor that I have sought to emulate. I am also grateful to her for a body of teaching and writing that transformed my thinking; for demonstrating so well the art of theoretical invention and encouraging my own attempt at it; and for a friendship that sustained me and gave me the courage to go on. I hope the book that emerges from this dissertation will appear to her as a metamorphosis of her own thought, and that she can already see an aspect of her own consciousness at work in my own. My deepest thanks to you.

Stefania Pandolfo knows the profound difference she made early on in my thinking and writing; I would have never found my way had she not first shown me the road. She also knows, probably better than I, how much the anthropology I engage in here is in fact an approach on loan from her. So much about this text—its narrative dimension, its object, its conceptual approach—comes from her, and would have never emerged had she not cultivated the ethos of writerly ingenuity and intellectual intensity that is her own. The excesses and failures of this text remain my responsibility, but whatever successes it contains stem from her rare spirit. I will be happy if she feels that her own work on “other psyches” furthered here.

Diana Anders’ friendship and care were unfailing, even during her darkest hours; Jean Lave reminded me the whole way that dissidence is often the breath of intellectual life; and Fawn Moran opened me to an experience of myself that brought me forever out of “the same” and gave me the insights behind my thoughts.

The friendship and dialogue of Saul Mercado, Yves Winter, Katherine Lemons, Cindy Huang, Nima Bassiri, Patrice Bone, and Alexei Gostev were essential at different points during my time at Berkeley, and the teaching of Paul Rabinow and Pheng Cheah brought me into form so that I could better go out of it. Paul Rabinow deserves special recognition for creating an atmosphere of rigor, seriousness, freedom, and tension in Berkeley’s Department of Anthropology; without it, my work would have had nowhere to grow. Bill Hanks and Donald Moore gave me generous encouragement along the way, and Claude Imbert first taught me how anthropology and philosophy can be effectively joined.

My parents, Peter and Linda Skafish, were there for me during my worst moments, and I trust they can see that their intelligence and kindness is alive in this text. My sister, Beth Skafish, gave me her complicity and love at every turn.

I would like to dedicate this work to Vivian Chen. Your warmth, patience, fidelity, and love during the time of its writing made everything possible, and the uniqueness of your perspective changed how I see the world. I hope the image of the self I pursue here is as rich as your own vision, and that my gratitude is able to reach you.

—INTRODUCTION—

GOD AS AN EVENT, A DECENTRALIZED GOD—THE GOD OF JANE

Hers was an everything-God, a God everywhere and in all things while nowhere rising completely out of it all, “A DECENTRALIZED GOD” not culminating in some ultimate, scarcely encountered ontological peak or resting altogether and terrifyingly outside (as a mysterious nothing) the parts of the real encompassed by human purview, the God(s) of “A DEMOCRACY OF SPIRIT” *putting “an end to divine hierarchies”* (“no one person or group or dogma or book can presume to speak [of it] in absolute terms”) since *its God is nothing else besides all the “VERSIONS OF GOD” that each of the real’s instances* (and every “vision” of these) *are*, and thus also a “God” that *“would be dispersed throughout creation,” “wouldn’t be confined to one people or nation or species”*—“each creature, each life whatever its degree would have its right as an expression of” it—and that would therefore be nowhere in charge of or able to hierarchize or completely organize and arrange itself: it would just be “MULTIPLE,” or “many gods” and “multiple worlds.”

Inseparable from and never in the end transcending all this diversity, her God—God as it all, God as just this or that—also had, then, to be thoroughly temporal, a “God that must still be happening,”<sup>1</sup> “GOD AS AN EVENT,”<sup>2</sup> God when God, while still remaining in some way an “origin,” heads so far into time that “TIME STRUCTURES”—“EVENTS” so singular that “not even a god could get inside them”<sup>3</sup>—transform it from a first, generative “source” into the “uniqueness” of its manifestation as each occurrence of each thing, and the capacity of these to create, to make “creativity constantly continue.”<sup>4</sup>

Her “GOD AS EVENT,” God cum all such events, is a God whose “actualizations” are “inventions” or “new versions” of the prior, “greater models” of them first come from itself (as an older sort of God) since “*their own originality* alters the models even while their existence arises from them” so that the “*models of themselves... are constantly changing*,” all things end up “*unique variations of themselves*,” and God, because as much itself and the models as all these versions, turns out to be “ORIGINAL ECCENTRICITY,”<sup>5</sup> the decenteredness of “classical models” perpetually altered into and by “*fantastic eccentrics*” which themselves then play the role of “classical models”<sup>6</sup> such that “*the son is the father of his father in quite as valid a way as he is the son, and vice versa.*”<sup>7</sup> A God or bunch of “gods” inseparable from the singular instants in which they take place, from events as what happen just once and that in doing so change and subordinate what makes them. Her event(s)-God, “whatever this God is...” therefore “is *not static or unchanging*”—not “*perfect beyond all change or fulfillment, almost like a senile god with nowhere to*

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Roberts, *Adventures in Consciousness: An Aspect Psychology Book* (Needham, Massachusetts: Moment Point Press, 1999 [1975]), 158. Hereafter cited as AC.

<sup>2</sup> AC, 157.

<sup>3</sup> AC, 190.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Roberts, *The ‘Unknown’ Reality, Volumes One and Two: A “Seth” Book* (San Rafael: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1996 [1977-1979]), 518. Hereafter cited as UR.

<sup>5</sup> UR, 517.

<sup>6</sup> UR, 519.

<sup>7</sup> UR, 516.

go but down...<sup>8</sup> but a god, instead, that “surprises” itself, and *where (spiritual) “psychic and historic events fuse and henceforth cannot be separated.”*<sup>9</sup>

The gods-God that was hers—and that, as an expression of it, she was in part making up (all versions of God being, as such, “god-makers”<sup>10</sup> through inevitably engaging, as further divine actualizers or “makers,” in more “god-making”<sup>11</sup>)—this God not only undoes the basic, originary and creative, ontological status still almost universally attributed God or the ultimate by its (Jewish-Christian-Islamic-Hindu) faithful but even blurs the line between potential and actual. Since this God, again, and each of its parts or PSYCHES can never finally be distinguished from their instantiations or variations, actualities (which then lack essences or forms proper to them) are likewise not discrete in relation to each other: one thing, under such a God, can actually “be” another.

This “God” that is no longer really God was indeed so much her own (things have probably never quite been put this way) that she gave it her name. “THE GOD OF JANE,” this “GOD-IN-CAMOUFLAGE”<sup>12</sup> (it only “appears within the camouflage of the world itself”<sup>13</sup>), because it nowhere draws all of itself back together and can only for that reason be conceived from the perspectives of each of its myriad parts, this God had to be hers and, in that way, hers alone. “An appeal to that God would be an appeal to that portion of the universal creativity from which we personally emerge... *that otherwise inconceivable intersection between Being and our being,*”<sup>14</sup> “and in those terms, I thought, we do have a personal God, no matter who—or what—we are: the God of Joe, the God of Lester, the God of Sarah...”<sup>15</sup> “The God of Jane,” too, because “we haven’t been free to form any new conceptions of divinity” for so long (“any new visions of God seem to be blasphemy”) that she still stands virtually alone in realizing that “*in reshaping our gods, we reshape ourselves.*”<sup>16</sup>

Jane’s God, or as she also put it, “CONCEPT OF BEING,” was so indelibly her own that it really was an event and cannot, as that, be even halfway extricated from her words, the peculiar circumstances of their articulation, and the entirety of the life these comprised. This speculative “God” was thus first of all, as is probably by now evident, a mystic’s god—but that of a mystic, by this Jane’s own reckoning, of a quite singular kind.

“I’ve never,” she would write, “had that kind of mystical experience, so lauded by many, in which a Jane dissolves into God.”<sup>17</sup> Instead of the experiences of union, divine presence, transcendence, silence, and no-self at the heart of the mystical traditions of the West, hers (closer to those of some of the feminine mystics, whether men or women) were visions, tactile anomalies, and even feelings of merger with things besides herself: “I became transfixed... [by] a piece of crumpled newspaper that kept blowing in the wind... I was kinetically part of its flights...”<sup>18</sup> There was also glossolalia, the babbled, nonsensical

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Roberts, *The God of Jane* (Moment Point Press: Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 2000 [1981]), 236. Hereafter cited as *GOJ*.

<sup>9</sup> *GOJ*, 237.

<sup>10</sup> *GOJ*, 199.

<sup>11</sup> *GOJ*, 196.

<sup>12</sup> *AC*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> *AC*, 159.

<sup>14</sup> *GOJ*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> *GOJ*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> *GOJ*, 65.

<sup>17</sup> *AC*, 158-159. “But I do believe,” she continues, “that God ‘dissolves’ in all his beings, and that we rise into consciousness and song because our individuality is part of any God-head.”

<sup>18</sup> *AC*, 82.



composite of various languages that prophets or the spiritually inspired resort to (much more than do mystics) in order to express the inexpressible, sightings of the future, and apparent journeys outside her body. Most importantly, Jane's foremost passion—the specific kind of passivity and receptivity through which her intersectional “God” could occur as her—was possession, the takeover and displacement of oneself by what could be called “the spirit of another,” a mode of ecstasy the mystical traditions and their Eastern counterparts usually frowned upon (at least officially) and kept at their periphery. For her, though, God arrived that way, as the event—the anomalous, untenable, at first barely perceptible happening—of a trance, where a big “fragment” of a God all bits and pieces (“*all things*” the fragment said, “*are in a sense fragments*”) showed itself; when something that felt like a vast intelligence and immaterial power (what felt like a god) spoke instead of and as her, and took form in her as a persona or alter-ego who called itself “SETH.”

Her own God—this little “god,” herself, their intersection, and some other swathes of the real they reached into—was nonetheless a mystic's in a more familiar sense. Apart from being a visionary and a medium or channel (the latter being a term she helped invent), she was someone given, as so many mystics were, to writing, and to the mixing together in it of poetry, autobiography, visionary description, instruction in spiritual technique, quasi-philosophical thinking, and even fiction characteristic of their tradition. A would-be poet in adolescence who later earned herself a claim to a writer's identity when she published a science fiction novel and some short stories in her late twenties, she was incapable of refraining from offering literary and sometimes poetic accounts of her ecstasies, of seeking a reading public for them, and of keeping them pure of the veridical and characterological promiscuity of the sort of language people who write keep company with. The autobiographical accounts of her visionary itinerary fill four published volumes (*The Seth Material*, *Adventures in Consciousness*, *Psychic Politics*, and *The God of Jane*), but her most popular works were the results of the fact that her mysticism was so much a writerly one that what it allowed her to think came mostly in the (transcribed) language of her trances and the other person she morphed into during them. In fact, *Seth Speaks*, *The Unknown Reality*, *The Individual and The Nature of Mass Events*, and more than seven others titles carrying the imprint “A Seth Book” on their covers attest to just how indissociable for her the ecstasies of writing and language were from spiritual rapture: a quasi-fictional character or literary-psychological *daimon*, they show, was as important to her as God itself, and language was so free and mobile in her work that the latter elaborates new perspectives on the matters it discusses without always bothering to reconcile or clear up the possible contradictions or logical relations between them.

This odd mysticism, though, was not only or even primarily writerly (or grammatological) and the claims about the real that came out of it accordingly not just the tracks of language gone off the rails. “I questioned them incessantly,” she wrote of her experiences. “Intuitively I was intrigued, but intellectually I was scandalized” by them—being “critical,” “skeptical,” and “experimental,” “something had to expand in my concepts” if they were to make sense.<sup>19</sup> Her visions and channeling usually, in fact, turned out to be responses to her questions, the verbal answers turning increasingly intellectual until they effectively amounted to a “*conceptual framework*,” “*speculation*,” and a “*metaphysics*”—a “*body of theory*,” as she also put it, whose profuse neologisms, unique phrases, and rerouted terms (“*concepts*”) arose more from her surprising fluency in the still uncoded art of formulating

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<sup>19</sup> AC, 4.

questions, the naked and innocent wonder its practice requires, and her strange intellectual strength than the fact she had constant, easy, and literally mediumistic access to language's power to write itself out. In other words, she had a strange penchant and strange commitment to the even stranger work of thinking, and this led her, as it did so many of the old mystics, to an experience of "God" almost as intellectual as it was immediate, the endless road of conceiving and specifying it, and thus right into something much like philosophy.

So "THE GOD OF JANE" was a conceptual and nearly philosophical God that often revealed itself only through concepts, sequences of thought, their literary illustrations, or, more simply, words. Yet it nonetheless was, again, a "God" so much her own that its thinking never happened outside her life and constant reference to it. There was always, occurring alongside it, this one JANE ROBERTS, born in 1928 in Saratoga Springs, New York to a disabled, possibly psychotic working-class woman ("a bedridden, arthritic invalid... one day my mother would say that she loved me, and the next day she'd scream that she was sorry I'd ever been born—that I'd ruined her life"<sup>20</sup>) whom she would, for much of her youth, care for and attend to ("I was up with her half the night for years, to give her the bedpan, fix her pillows, obey reasonable and unreasonable demands, and fill the oil burner, which always ran out of fuel around 4 A.M."<sup>21</sup>) before crossing her small town, on scholarship, for one Skidmore College, proto-feminist politics, her apprenticeship as a writer, and, after that, a cross-country escape from her past ("I left for California with a fellow student... who had a motorcycle..."<sup>22</sup>), an eventual return to upstate New York, and, much later, a vision that would change everything ("between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force, as if my skull were some sort of receiving station, turned up to unbearable volume"<sup>23</sup>)... But only after her collision some years prior with ROBERT BUTTS, a painter ten years her senior and decades her intellectual junior whom she wed in 1954 ("I knew that Rob was for me the minute I met him"<sup>24</sup>) and who became the constant accomplice to her mysticism by sitting down for thrice-weekly "sessions"—think séance-cum-working meeting—where he would transcribe the discourses of the oracle she became for-as-with-through-in her "god"... one SETH, a sort of maverick, intellectual demigod residing outside time (after a successful run of terrestrial incarnations) and lecturing via telepathic hookup in baritone, absurdly accented English; he also was, more profoundly (according to one of his most succinct self-descriptions), "someone, on the one hand, you do not know, lost in the annals of the past and the future as you understand them" while also, "on other hand, I am yourself..."<sup>25</sup> There was, too, ELMIRA, NEW YORK, an early casualty of deindustrialization ("a depressed

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<sup>20</sup> "She blamed me for the death of her mother who went out one evening to buy me shredded wheat for supper and was killed in an automobile accident. I was six. She also blamed me for the death of our favorite housekeeper, who died of a stroke in my arms when I was thirteen, right after the three of us had an argument. My mother would often stuff her mouth with cotton and hold her breath, pretending that she was dead, to scare me when I was small. In years later, when I was in grade school and high school she's threaten suicide, sometimes saying that she'd also mail a letter to the police stating that I'd murdered her. And she did attempt suicide four or five times." *GOJ*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> *GOJ*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> *GOJ*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks* (San Rafael: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1996), 5.

<sup>24</sup> *GOJ*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> *AC*, 14.

region not yet in the kind of crisis situation that would draw great federal funds”<sup>26</sup>) then six hours out from Manhattan, four from Buffalo, and dead center in the part of the state the Spiritualist mediums of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were most active in and that was (because the fervor of the Christian revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries reached its most incendiary temperatures there) once known as “the burned-through district,” a lowly, no-place of a town whose biggest distinction in Jane’s accounts was to be flooded nine-feet under one weekend but where she and Rob could afford to rent two adjoining apartments (one for work, the other for life) where some cats lived with them, where the sessions, the visions, weirder and more banal things, and all the rest of it happened, where her “psychic classes” (in which ecstatic techniques were taught like painting might be) were held weekly throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and where friends and visitors would pass through. Among them: RICHARD BACH, author, most famously, of the poem *Jonathon Livingston Seagull*, a longtime staple of high-school English classes that came to him in two involuntary, automatic rushes separated by eight years (“the story of the book’s conception is by now well known...”<sup>27</sup>); SUE WATKINS, friend, eventual author of an autobiographical account of her time with Jane, and the most reliable reporter of the medical difficulties that plagued the latter (“about all she could do was sit and write and there was the crux of her difficulties”<sup>28</sup>); and the here mostly unspecified VISITORS who came for psychic readings, healings, to challenge the famous teacher, or while manically roaming in search of existential resolve.

Nothing she would ever say about or as her god was disconnected from her concerns with occult, psychic knowledge and the rest of this whole “cast” of her life—the peculiar people who became the dramatis personae of her texts as well as the shape her ideas and the God they concerned took from being elaborated right through all these “eccentrics.” Her writings often have for that reason a prosaic and seemingly naïve character that makes it difficult to perceive (let alone decipher the meaning of) the concepts littered throughout them. Discussions of Jane’s psychic predictions, Rob’s development as a painter, their past incarnations, and the spiritual dilemmas of their housecats seem to outnumber and muddle the lucid passages treating still more issues than have so far been indicated: language, sexual difference, the brain, the relation of cells to time... Jane’s boredom with academic learning,

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<sup>26</sup> Jane Roberts, *The Nature of Personal Reality (A Seth Book)* (San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1994), 357. The characterization is Jane-as-Seth’s.

<sup>27</sup> “Late one night in 1959,” Rob write in his notes to one of Jane’s book, “Dick was walking beside a canal near a West Coast beach when he heard a voice say, ‘Jonathan Livingston Seagull.’ No one else was around. He was astonished. He was even more so when, on his return home, the voice initiated images that gave him the bulk of the book in three-dimensional form. Then it stopped. On his own Dick tried to unsuccessfully to finish the manuscript. Nothing happened until one day eight years later, when he suddenly wakened to hear the voice again—and with it the rest of the book. Who wrote it? Dick didn’t claim authorship. He came across *The Seth Material*, saw similarities in Jane’s and his experience, and came here to see if she or Seth could explain the phenomenon.” NPR, 53.

<sup>28</sup> “At the time Jane was writing this book,” Watkins writes in a preface included in a recent reprinting of *The God of Jane*, “her physical problems (rheumatoid arthritis, complications of which led to her death in 1984) had been accruing for some time, albeit with periodic remissions and improvements, and by the late seventies she was basically unable to move around with extreme difficulty. She couldn’t go outside and take a walk around the block, plant flowers, go to the post office or movies, meet a friend for coffee, or have any of the... other simple pleasures that most of us do with ease. About all she could do was sit and write; and there was the crux of her difficulties... She was extremely wary of everyday life and its diversions, fearing that if she gave into her impulses (whatever those might be), her days would slide by in an uncontrolled frittering-away of time and creative energy, an imagined scenario that absolutely terrified her and, when she perceived it in others, drew her haughtiest disdain.” *GOJ*, xviii.

apparently slim library, and only scarce and imprecise references to some of the authors in it (such as PLATO, EMERSON, FREUD, and JUNG) doing little to help matters, the only “metaphysics” her books would seem to concern would belong on the shelf of the same name at Barnes and Noble.

So despite her real writerly and intellectual prowess, Jane’s psychic predilections apparently left her at the same time confused. Yet her confusion—of ordinary life, the personal, possession, the occult, and lowbrow writing with concepts, speculative thinking, mysticism, and knowledge—is paradoxically enough the very thing that enables her work to be all of the latter and even now perhaps bear on their recognized instances.

Because if Jane’s “God”—a simultaneously vernacular and (a)theologico-philosophical conception of *a real that, because it is composed only of versions of versions of “itself” (but not originals), is an “original eccentricity” and primal reversibility that also therefore entails a “decentralization” so complete that things can neither be entirely distinguished from other things that they might have been nor for that reason established as themselves (such that each thing is “itself” plural)*—if her God is really all of that, she is obviously already capable of entering into dialogue with what some “actual” philosophers (those of difference) had in their most trenchant moments to say about these and closely related matters of *origin, versions, possibility and actuality, time, multiplicity*, and, most importantly, *psyche*. Moreover, even from what little of her has so far been seen (transcendental/“psychic and historical events fuse and henceforth cannot be separated”) it is apparent that she might even have been ahead of the philosophers before they were close to having finished up. Understanding, however, exactly what Jane meant by all these terms and how her “versions” of them might indeed speak to questions not precisely her own requires entering the weird, flipside world of her trances and closely engaging her descriptions of these. Once we do, we will discover that her writings were largely attempts to address the questions her ecstasies raised for her, and that it was because and not despite of her occult, “psychic life” that these are now capable not only of functioning as *theory* but also of offering through that *an unprecedented concept of the self*: a self, much like Jane claimed to be in her trances, that is itself and another simultaneously—and cognizant of it.

But how to find one’s way to the beginnings of an understanding of any of this—Jane’s texts, her questions and concepts, their stakes, and the relation of all of this to her strange, oracular life—is by no means self-evident. Not only would starting at the beginning be unlikely (as will soon become evident) to yield the presence of her thoughts in the texts, but getting anywhere with them upon arrival would be next to impossible without an appropriate approach to reading. Yet since this psychic-philosophical brew would be barely intelligible to even radical modes of interpretation, we will have to jump in head first, and just invent one. The work that will entail will require approaching the foreignness and singularity of the texts as would an anthropologist, taking up their speculative thoughts as would a philosopher, and considering their mystical project as someone concerned with the future of religion—and thus contending with how making thoughts like Jane’s theoretically conceivable requires (helping) give birth to *an anthropology of concepts, philosophically retreating the concept of the foreign*, and even *joining both to a mystical-visionary (but not supernaturalist) mode of thinking*. So despite not knowing exactly why we have found ourselves before this Jane or what all these intellectual projects might mean or entail, we will have to let ourselves be drawn into the midst of her life and world...

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The chapter title (which could also be a heading) simply reads “SESSION 718: NOVEMBER 6, 1974; 9:50 PM WEDNESDAY,” and is followed by three pages of italicized text, all in parentheses, that begins: “(On Monday, November 4, I mailed to Jane’s publisher all of the art due for her *Adventures in Consciousness: An Introduction to Aspect Psychology*...”<sup>29</sup> The book the text comes from is called *The Unknown Reality*, the writing her husband Rob’s, and the content a descriptions of the happenings surrounding this particular séance (a “book dictation” instead of a “regular session”) with “Seth,” the book’s primary author...

*“I hope these introductory notes,” Rob elsewhere in the volume writes of them generally, “will explain Jane’s trance performances from my view, as I can... her behavior while she’s ‘under,’ the varied, powerful, or muted use of her voice as she speaks for Seth, her stamina and humor in sessions, the speed or slowness of her delivery. But above all, I try to help the reader appreciate the uncanny feeling of energy and/or intelligence—of personality—in the sessions” (of “conscious energy taking a guise that’s at least somewhat comprehensible to us”).<sup>30</sup> “(Jane insists,” he adds, “that the notes are important, as a constant reminder to the reader that psychic events happen in the context of daily life.”<sup>31</sup>*

*“(Before what we expected to be our last regular session for Monday,” the present notes continue, “a development took place that left us puzzled, intrigued, and more than a little upset. Yet at this writing [immediately following the 718<sup>th</sup> session], I can note that we’ve been relieved by subsequent events. It seems that a combination of factors led to those oddly disturbing yet challenging occurrences... One is probably just the state of Jane’s recent exceptional psychic receptivity. Another is my own longtime interest in the American psychologist and philosopher, William James [1842-1910]; he wrote the classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*...”<sup>32</sup>*

“Jane suddenly told me,” Rob says (still in notes that will no longer be marked with his italics) of the prior session, “that she was picking up material on the ‘essence’ of William James. Because of his own persistent melancholy, she said, James had been able to understand others with the same kind of disposition. As she continued to give her impressions, though, I wondered: Why James? ...Why this picking up on, and identifying with, a famous dead personality? Most likely my own interest in James’s work exerted some influences on Jane’s newly developing abilities, I thought;

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<sup>29</sup> UR, 402.

<sup>30</sup> UR, 282. Passage slightly modified. Here and throughout the narrative portions of this book, I sometimes make small alterations to quotations from Roberts’s work in order to more fluidly present it. In cases where I am engaged in what would commonly be regarded as the exegesis or interpretation of her writings, I indicate by standard diacritical marks (ellipses in brackets) or precise quotation where her words end and mine begin. I have allowed myself some license in narrative expositions of her material because ethnographic texts rarely cite quotations from their “informants” or reproduce exactly interviews with them for the obvious reason that to do so would result in completely unwieldy texts and for the unstated reason that anthropologists rarely acknowledge their ability to reshape quotations to make the latter say what they want them to. Here I sometimes help Jane’s say what I need them to in order to better let her say something she in fact did. I ask that the difference be noted between my (avowed) procedure and that of many pieces of ethnographic writing ostensibly driven by an “ethical” impulse to “witness” but that nonetheless offer little explanation of how quotation, story, and analysis were generated from field notes, recordings, or sheer memory.

<sup>31</sup> UR, 276.

<sup>32</sup> UR, 403.

but that still didn't answer my questions... 'I was getting just now,' Jane said at 8:58, 'that James called his melancholy 'a cast of soul.' Her eyes were closed. 'Now I'm getting a book... I see this printed material, only it's very small, almost microscopic, and oddly enough the whole thing is printed on grayish-type paper. I see it really small, in my mind.' And with that, in an altered states of consciousness, Jane began delivering last Monday evening the material from the book she mentally saw."<sup>33</sup>

"(Here's a small quotation from it," his notes continue, "dealing with a part of a vision 'James' had following his physical death:

*'There was a procession, a procession of the gods that went before my very eyes. I wondered and watched silently. Each god or goddess had a poet who went in company, and the poets sang that they gave reason voice. They sang gibberish, yet as I listened the gibberish turned into a philosophical dialogue. The words struck at my soul. A strange mirror-image type of action followed, for when I spoke the poets' words backwards, to my intellect they made perfect sense.'*<sup>34</sup>

"I felt as if the James stuff," Jane is recorded as saying, "was coming from a person who was very intent about trying to say something."<sup>35</sup>

"(Which pointed up our dilemma," Rob then notes. "I said little to James, but I was most uneasy that Jane was delivering material supposedly from a member of the famous dead. Actually, we'd always thought that such performances were somehow suspect. Not that mediums, or others, couldn't communicate with the 'dead'—but to us, anyhow, exhibitions involving well-known personages usually seem... psychologically tainted [meaning "strained," too acted, and thus inauthentic] [...] So our feelings about the night's affairs weren't of the best at that point. We were also aware of the humorous aspect of the situation, since Jane does speak for at least one of the dead: Seth. And, of course, as we sat for tonight's session, we wondered if Seth would discuss what had happened Monday night."<sup>36</sup>

At this point, Rob recounts Jane's actions as "Seth" just prior to the beginning of the session and what will indeed be her comments (as him) on "the James affair":

(As Seth, Jane took a swallow of milk. She promptly made a most disapproving face. Her features wrinkled up, her lips drew back. She held the half-empty glass up to me, her Seth voice booming out: "This is far different from any milk that I ever drank. It is like a chalk with chemicals, far divorced from any cow!" (Still in trance, Jane set the milk aside. She didn't return to it, but sipped her wine for the rest of the session. I was tempted to ask Seth to explain his idea of what good milk was like, and in what life (or lives) he'd enjoyed such a potion, but I didn't want to interrupt the flow of the material.

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<sup>33</sup> UR, 403-404.

<sup>34</sup> UR, 404.

<sup>35</sup> UR, 404.

<sup>36</sup> UR, 405.

While tasting the milk during the break, however, Jane ‘herself’ had had no such reaction.)<sup>37</sup>

Right after this, Seth turns to the issue of exactly how Jane could have channeled a dead philosopher. “Jane picked up on the world view,” he says, “of a man known dead.

She was not directly in communication with William James. She was aware, however, of the universe through William James’s worldview. As you might dial a program on a television set, Jane tuned into the view of a reality now held in the mind of William James... To do this, she had to be free enough to accept the view of reality as perceived by someone else. So Jane allowed one portion of her consciousness to remain securely anchored in its own reality while letting another portion soak up, so to speak, a reality not its own.<sup>38</sup>

.... So far, little about the text explicitly connects it to the concepts and grand statements with which we began. Although it would be difficult not to find certain elements of these passages interesting or remarkable (Rob’s curious, reflexive marginalia, this scene of a séance with William James, and the philosopher’s ostensible description of his postmortem vision of a procession of poets and their gods), only this last excerpt offers anything approaching an intellectual reflection on the problems Jane’s mediumship raised in this case for her husband and her. But even this statement is barely scientific or critical: saying that Jane was in touch not with the soul or personality of James but with his depersonalized, etheric “worldview” merely expresses a supernaturalist (and not, at that, very clear) perspective, while the assertion that the means through which this connection could be made was the partitioning—not the suspension—of her consciousness seems typical of the modern, Cartesian faith in the subject to which a dissociated thinker would seem naturally opposed.

Yet perusing neighboring passages of the text to get a sense of whether there is anything more to the passage soon yields it. Consciousness, it turns out, is presumed to be something quite different than it usually is. Apart from what could be read as a squarely modern claim about the extent of its power (“consciousness is always conscious of itself, and of its validity and integrity, and in those terms there is no unconsciousness”), it is portrayed in the next pages as being essentially non-anthropological (“there are simply different kinds of consciousness, and you cannot basically compare one to the other anymore than you can compare, say, a toad to a star to an apple to a thought to a woman to a child to a native to a suburbanite to a spider to a cat; they are varieties of consciousness, each focused upon its own view of reality”), as an almost prosthetic outgrowth humans and other organisms resort to in order to contend with time (“time considerations involve extensions of consciousness by which separations can occur and divisions can be made; in terms of an organic structure, this could be likened to developing another arm or leg, or protrusion or filament—another method of locomotion through another dimension”), and, ultimately, as the basic,

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<sup>37</sup> UR, 422.

<sup>38</sup> UR, 406-408.

transindividual substance of the real that saints and mystics often see it as (“the vitalizing force behind everything in your physical universe, and others as well”).<sup>39</sup> “Seth’s” claim that splitting her consciousness into anchored and adrift parts allowed Jane to channel a philosopher is likewise revealed to be quite precise and very unusual. Scanning prior chapters turns up discussions and precise exercises the reader can employ to accomplish this division (“try to experience all of your present sense data as fully as you can,” and “when you find this focus point... let your consciousness stray”<sup>40</sup>); most of these hinge on conceiving consciousness of an ordinary sort (which is again figured technologically) as being focused on “a home station” that can be switched off to various degrees so that what is then a freed portion of it can be tuned to other “stations” and “programs” not belonging to either the individual or the present world. William James (or Jung or Cézanne or Rembrandt, who will all be reached this way) can be “channeled” because consciousness is basically a receiver capable of picking up other perspectives than those with which, as human apperception, it is supposed to be identical.

At this point, the intellectual dimensions of the text start becoming more apparent: its detailed exercises are reminiscent of what to most of us is the often surprisingly methodical application of rationality to behavior of the classic spiritual instructors and mystics like Teresa of Avila and Ignatius; its brilliant, leftfield statements about consciousness recall the sorts of ideas that result (think Schreber or Swedenborg) when psychotic or immediately religious ideas are given analytic or systematic form; subsequent, largely esoteric discussions of how human consciousness clusters into different “families” (such as the “Sumari,” “Gramada,” and “Sumafi,” who are, respectively, creative visionaries, social reformers, and teachers) resemble the often absurdly obsessive typologies—Barthes called them attempts at “logosthesis,” or “the founding of languages”<sup>41</sup>—frequently drawn up in visionary and utopian writing; and the use of technological metaphors to characterize spirit suggests, finally, science fiction’s attempts to acknowledge the collapse of the old borders between machines, humans, and even ghosts and gods. What most stands out, however, is a clearly articulated understanding of the real that seems the basic assumption underlying these other elements of Jane’s writing as well as, perhaps, their most central claim: because each consciousness picks up and mixes with others, “*the self is multitudinous and not singular*” (where “*singular*” means *simple and unitary*).<sup>42</sup>

It quickly turns out to be, at bottom, a mystic’s intuition. The real is one vast, greater consciousness distinguished into individual foci that nonetheless overlap and blend together in a fashion that scarcely respects the bodies to which they correspond. Another deep dive into the text yields a more exact picture of its meaning and relation to the initial question of how one could “channel philosophy”...

“Many people realize intuitively,” we read, “that the self is multitudinous and not singular... This basic nature of reality shows itself in the nature of the dream state quite clearly, where in any given night you may find yourself undertaking many roles simultaneously. You may change sex, social position, national or religious alliance, age, and yet know yourself as yourself

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<sup>39</sup> UR, 413-414, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> UR, 413-414.

<sup>41</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Sade Fourier, Loyola*, Trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 3-10.

<sup>42</sup> UR, 442.



The creativity of any given soul is endless, so all of the potentials for experience will be explored. The poor man may dream he is a king. A queen, weary of her role, may dream of being a peasant girl. In the physical time that you recognize, the king is still a king, and the queen a queen. Yet their dreams are not as uncharacteristic or apart from their experience as it might appear. In greater terms, the king has been a pauper and the queen a peasant.<sup>43</sup>

This is because, he goes on, the psyche or “greater self ‘divides’ itself, materializing in flesh as several individuals” and intending through that to assume and understand as many perspectives as possible.<sup>44</sup> Since the present self or incarnation cannot, as “psychic consciousness,” be dissociated from what it is as these other selves, all differences and opposites are also simultaneously the same—“*the black man is somewhere a white man or woman,*” “*the white man or woman is somewhere black,*” “*the oppressor the oppressed,*” “*the conquerer the conquered,*” “*the primitive sophisticated,*” and “*the murderer somewhere the victim, and the other way around*”—and every self thus a plurality of selves.<sup>45</sup>

Continuing to read shows this understanding of self-plurality to be so developed that it locates the self's other versions not only in other eras but also several times over in its own. “You also live more than one life at one time,” Jane-as-Seth initially explains in a reprise of older enunciations of her teachings. “You do not experience your century simply from one separate vantage point... but from many viewpoints [...] If you are gluttoned with a steak dinner, for example, in America or Europe, then you are also famished in another portion of the world, experiencing life from an entirely different viewpoint.”<sup>46</sup> These other, contemporary versions of oneself are called “counterparts” just as is (all the consistency and paradox the claim entails in play) that same oneself—“you are counterparts *of yourselves*,” he specifies, and thus, again, basically unlocalizable or “eccentric.”<sup>47</sup> This is so true, “Seth” adds, that it even extends to the least aspect of what appears the present version of oneself. “That selfhood jumps in leapfrog fashion over events it does not want to actualize,” he says in reference to the effects of its decisions, “and does not admit such experience into its selfhood. Other portions of your greater identity, however, do accept these same events rejected by you, and form their own selfhoods”<sup>48</sup>: “*every probable event that could happen to you, happens,*” “*all other possible lines of development occur,*” and there are always “*probable selves*” or other versions of one’s immediate self corresponding to these—except that these other selves are also oneself.<sup>49</sup>

Although these are bizarre and dizzying turns, they bring us back to the same, less obscure claim about the self's essence being “multitudinous.” The soul or psyche

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<sup>43</sup> UR, 442.

<sup>44</sup> UR, 443.

<sup>45</sup> UR, 443-444.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> UR, 445.

<sup>48</sup> UR, 43.

<sup>49</sup> UR, 41.

being the sum consciousness of all its incarnations, counterparts, and probabilities, all these nonetheless holding as distinct individuals, and consciousness not containing, as such, final divisions, “each identity of the psyche unites with the others while maintaining its identity”<sup>50</sup>—“can combine and unite with others, yet retain its uniqueness and experience,” “mix and merge while retaining an inviolate nature” (it “does not need fences”)<sup>51</sup>—and is thus at once itself and others. Once these clear enunciations of it have been made, the idea is again articulated in more open and paradoxical terms. Your counterparts’ memories may appear in your dreams states or fantasies,” and they are “*yours and not yours*.”<sup>52</sup>

*Counterparts are like latent patterns in your mind. Echoes. How many of you have thought of what the unconscious may actually be? Or the voices that you hear within your mind and heart? Are they yours? To what counterparts do they belong?*<sup>53</sup>

... Stepping back from the text again, its conceptual dimensions begin to come into view. Although Jane does not account here for her presumption that the soul, reincarnation, and parallel selves and streams of times are somehow real or true, she nonetheless conceives of them in a fashion that is one of the hallmarks of speculative and metaphysical thought (whether nominally “philosophical” or not). Instead of characterizing them in self-evident terms, she does so in a syntax of her own invention that imposes novel categories on the real—“counterparts,” “probable selves,” the “eccentric,” her notion of “psyche”—and then spells out their consequences for what would otherwise appear to be an unalterable, bedrock feature of it. Because she presupposes, that is, that these different facets of the psyche in part comprise a self ordinarily not thought to have persons foreign to it as integral elements, she redefines self so that its presumed traits—its voice, memories, and experience—are only as much a part of it as other things never ascribed to it: the voices, memories, and experiences of what are ostensibly other people. In other words, self is for her other selves many times over even as it is itself (“yours and not yours”), and this is even the very “essence” of self—of multitudinous self.

So despite being so exotic, this characterization of the self is indeed starting to sound like a concept—not just a general idea or a basic category of thought but one so thorough and profound that all the terms needed for defining it must themselves be just as precisely treated and redefined. Scanning through prior and subsequent chapters turns up, for instance, a discussion of how modern notions of the person as “one self, one body” prevent us from understanding the real multiplicity of the psyche and identity and will thus have to be redefined to make a “multipersonhood” conceivable—a mode of person where “several selves occupy a body” or “three or four individuals emerge from the same self” (which then has “many bodies”)—and this in turn requires specifying how consciousness could occur in forms (“other psychological gestalts”) radically different from the one it currently takes. Later pages see Jane attempting, while still “Seth,” to do this by postulating an “other-consciousness... able to bring in other-self material” and “capable of dealing with more than one line of consciousness” simultaneously (a consciousness “able to hold two lines at once

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<sup>50</sup> UR, 481.

<sup>51</sup> UR, 494-495.

<sup>52</sup> UR, 473.

<sup>53</sup> UR, 768.

while maintaining a footing in each”) and demonstrating afterward how a writer writing about her life has such a consciousness inasmuch as she “is the self who lives while being in a position of some apartness, able to comment upon the life being lived.”<sup>54</sup> This discussion even then branches into others concerning how temporal events would have to be in some fashion simultaneous for this consciousness to exist (“all ‘times’ exist at once”), sense perception must be amenable to other organizations if they are, and how current understandings of the self “are projected into concepts of God and the universe” that are then used as “model for the egotistical behavior of one self toward another self.”<sup>55</sup>

The “conceptness” of her self-concept ends up even more confirmed upon returning back to our point of departure and then examining its context. Jane was capable of channeling a philosopher, we recall her saying, because self is really always simultaneously both itself and several others, consciousness a meld of such apparently distinct consciousnesses, and mediumship a matter of anchoring part of “one’s” own in oneself while letting another part of it go adrift. Such feats were important to her, as further perusal reveals, because of the relation of this idea to ethics and spiritual practice—their goal, it turns out, being neither the loss nor the complete transcendence of self but its profound transformation...

“Man thought once,” we find “Seth” explaining, “historically speaking, that there was but one world,” and although “now he knows differently, he still clings to the idea of one god, one self, and one body through which to express it,” with the consequence that he “cannot begin to conceive of a multidimensional godhood, or a reality in which all consciousness is unique, inviolate—and yet given to the formation of infinite gestalts of organization and meaning.”<sup>56</sup> “But inherent always, psychologically and biologically,” he continues, “there has been the possibility of a change in that pattern. Such a development would, however, necessitate first of all a broadening of concepts about the self... Human consciousness is now at a stage where such a development is not only feasible, but necessary...”<sup>57</sup> “If such changes are not made,” he finishes, “the race as such will not endure.”<sup>58</sup>

“To do this, you must understand, again, that man must move beyond the concepts of one god, one self, one body, one world”—hence toward other concepts.

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So the concepts and theoretical speculations Jane attributed to her writings are indeed present in them, and close reading seems required to draw them out. Yet what such reading would entail in this case is by no means obvious: neither fiction nor an instance of an existing genre or tradition of religious writing, what has so far been seen of Jane’s work is not literature in those senses, and the fact the theory undertaken in it is articulated in an oracular, only half-rational mode also immediately separates it from humanistic or philosophical discourse proper and the particular hermeneutics reserved for it. Following—

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<sup>54</sup> UR, 124-125.

<sup>55</sup> UR, 73.

<sup>56</sup> UR, xxx.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> UR, 87.

let alone interpreting—a corpus of statements is next to impossible when existing approaches to reading prove in this way unsuitable for understanding its basic sense and import. The problem quickly becomes apparent when we realize that her concepts remain only so legible in the absence of a more extensive account of how her visionary and occult experiences could have given rise to them (and not just professions of faith or belief). It is unclear, in other words, how much sense can be made of her if we lack a picture of the thing about which she was trying to make sense.

The only likely solution to such an interpretive dilemma is to be found in an approach to interpretation that has for a long time been practiced by anthropologists. Faced with matters so opaque to oneself that forming hypotheses or even basic intuitions about them is impossible, reaching that threshold of interpretability first requires lingering with them long enough to understand and digest their basic terms and intelligibility. Applying the method here forces us to spend time with sections of Jane's books containing dazzling descriptions of her visions ("each thing glistened, stood apart with an almost miraculous separateness, even while it was something else... besides itself [...] I actually 'see' this extra reality over reality, so everything in my view is super-real"<sup>59</sup>) and poems treating some of her questions before we stumble over a passage that touches directly enough on her basic motive for thinking to clear it up...

"The woman through whom I speak," reads the preface to *The Unknown Reality* that Jane dictated as Seth, "found herself in an unusual situation, for no theories—metaphysical, psychological, or otherwise—could adequately explain her experience. She was led to develop her own, therefore, and this book is an extension of [them]."<sup>60</sup> Searching nearby for an account of exactly what was inexplicable in her experience yields a passage, now written in Jane's own voice, commenting on the peculiar method of the book's production. "*The 'Unknown Reality'* itself," it reads, "is a product of the unknown reality of the mind, since I produced it entirely in a trance state, as Seth.

In a way the two volumes are the products of an inner psychic combustion—the spark that is lit in our world, as Seth's reality strikes mine—or vice versa. For me, this is an accelerated state. I would compare it to a higher state of wakefulness rather than to the sleep usually associated with trance—but a different kind of wakefulness, in which the usual world seems to be the one that is sleeping. My attention is not blunted. It is elsewhere.<sup>61</sup>

After overlooking it multiple times, something unusual in this passage—its claim that the trance is more "a higher state of wakefulness" than "sleep" and involves refocusing (not extinguishing) attention—begins to stand out, and reading what follows in its weird light seems to provide the missing clue to the impetus behind her thinking. "As Jane," she continues in her own voice, "I'm not discarded when I'm in such a trance.

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<sup>59</sup> Jane Roberts, *Psychic Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976), 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> UR, xxx.

<sup>61</sup> UR, xxiii.

Yet I step out of my Jane-self in some indescribable way, and step right back into in when the session is over. So there must be another ‘I’ who leaves Jane patiently waiting at the shore when ‘I’ dive headlong into [] other dimensions of experience and identity. Once the almost instant transformation is over, ‘I’ become Seth or Seth becomes what I am. And in that state, the conditions of perception are those native to other lands of consciousness. [] Such sessions almost never wear me out. Instead, I’m more often refreshed than I was earlier. Usually I have little idea of time. As Seth I may speak for an hour, but when I ‘snap back’ I’ll look at the clock in surprise, thinking perhaps that 15 minutes have passed at most. The trance is not static, though. It has gradations and characteristics. These are almost impossible to explain, but the state isn’t always the same—it has peaks and valleys, psychological colorations and intensities that mark its nature [...] a feeling of inexhaustible energy, emotional wholeness, and subjective freedom. [...] Even in a trance, I’m aware of this, and I’m swept along in the energy.<sup>62</sup>

Although her account is somewhat inchoate, Jane nonetheless lucidly expresses that she perceives herself to have two or more selves or foci of awareness at one and the same time when in what was just seen to be the consciousness (which should be the unconsciousness) of the trance: an ‘I’ outside and separate from the trance inside which a second ‘I’ is awake and even merged and transformed into what might be yet another, more alien self.

... After the high, almost absolute strangeness of both this thought and its surprising precision has set it, its significance for her suddenly leaps out: Jane’s consciousness of being, in her terms, several selves or persons was so (probably disturbingly) incomprehensible—“no theories could explain her experience”—that she was indeed forced to elaborate her own, and her conceptions of a self-identity that is constitutively multiple (“eccentric” selfhood, “multipersonhood,” “other-consciousness”) and thus of actualities that are also what they are not (meaning what they ordinarily only could have been) were the results. The other formulations of this thought that continued reading quickly turns up again confirming this, the basically metaphysical problem provoking her to think can be seen emerging into full, psychedelic view.

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But even as some of the core questions animating her writing become available, the problem of its overall legibility reasserts itself. How ought one read the significance and stakes of such a strange mode of thinking? If it indeed effectively addresses a matter as fundamental as self, then where and exactly how does it bear on existing understandings of the latter? And how, once more, would it have to be interpreted if this relation were to be brought out or postulated?

Still absent the obvious reference points that would make a standard mode of interpretation immediately relevant—a genre or discursive context, an obvious historical situation, a clearcut, existing religious tradition—answers are not forthcoming, and both a

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<sup>62</sup> UR, xxiii-xxiv.

context and a method for approaching it first have to be established. Since continuing our patient digestion of the texts confirms that they only occasionally concern historical events, established theology, or specific theoretical or literary writers, the outside matters that could provide them context will also have to be as conceptual as the concepts that are instead most often their focus. Yet given the infrequency and imprecision of Jane's references to what she sees as her intellectual tradition, making decisions about exactly what her ideas could be compared to is no mean feat.

Presented with such elusive singularity, employing another simple anthropological method becomes necessary. Drawing up an index of the most recurrent and emphasized terms in her writing—"psyche," "person," "multiple," and "multiperson" indeed comprise a large part of its core lexical mass—not only clarifies what the basic, "indigenous" categories organizing her thinking are but indicates how it might be linked and then compared to concepts external to it. Starting with one whose presence here could seem unusual because it does not typically carry a theoretical valence, "the person" indicates a first reference: the conceptions (which are not reducible to or only material forms) of "plural and composite" personhood peculiar to Melanesian societies and profoundly alien to the modern Western form (which "one self, one body" significantly captures) in conceiving the individual—or "dividual"—as something that alternates between being, on the one hand, externally discrete but internally dual and, on the other, externally dual but internally single.<sup>63</sup> Seeing the vast disparity between the Melanesian and "European" forms suddenly makes Jane's seem a strange (she would say "trace") appearance of something like the former in an (increasingly worldwide) society and era incapable of it. Yet this point of comparison is too distant, so continuing to search on this basis for terms analogous to Jane's brings us to others that she in fact comments on: the psychiatric conception of multiple personality as a state in which a person serves as a "host" to several distinct "alter" personalities; more common mental illnesses or states of madness she might suffer from (both hysteria and schizophrenia are plausible); spirit or demonic possession in its Euroamerican, especially Spiritualist, mode; and the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of "soul" and reincarnation that perhaps somewhere endorse or anticipate her idea of the person.

Assuming, however, that these terms and their sociohistorical referents furnish the primary context for hers proves fruitless. Combing the texts for comments on these topics finds her refusing to accept psychoanalytic and psychiatric characterizations of her situation ("the unconscious," "dual personality," "schizophrenia," "Freud," and even "Jung" are all outright rejected, and "Seth" even takes pains to distinguish himself from a "double personality"), distinguishing her acts of channeling from spiritualist mediumship and other forms of spirit possession ("if we take it for granted that everything we can't explain is the result of 'spirits,' then we're just left with dogma..."<sup>64</sup>), and staying at a complete distance from what she simply dubs "Eastern" views of the soul (even though "the gurus say to never trust the self you are, but the Self you should be... it is a privilege to look out with this unique focus, with these individual eyes; not to be blinded by cosmic vision"<sup>65</sup>), and her

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<sup>63</sup> See Marilyn Strathern, *Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> AC, 20.

<sup>65</sup> UR, 695-696. The full text, a fragment written in Jane's own voice, this statement comes from expresses a motive animating much of her writing:

"What is this passion for nonbeing, this denial of sensual life, that drives so many gurus and self-proclaimed prophets? They speak out against desire while propelled by the overwhelming desire to lose themselves. They luxuriate in a kind of cosmic

grounds for not adopting these concepts as her own is almost always the same: casting her experience in their terms never leaves her with any real understanding of it, and her own reasoning about it is strong enough to challenge their general validity. Even where (as will become clear) her own thinking has to be ignored so that real links with these ideas can be followed, they do not furnish her context precisely because they fail, with one exception, to stand up to her objections to their basic premises or the relevance of these to her case.<sup>66</sup>

Yet even if scrutinizing her lexicon again affirms the uniqueness of her writings, it nonetheless also points toward a first means of locating them. In most of the instances, we see, where Jane has to resort to neologisms and inventive phrases in order to make her thoughts intelligible, she joins together terms whose senses are roughly opposite and even sometimes expressly antithetical to each other: MULTIPLE (“many, plural,” “compound, composite,” “having several [...] aspects, locations,” “consisting of [...] many parts, elements”) + PERSON (“an individual human being”); OTHER (“as noun... usually opposed to *self*,” “a person other than oneself”) + CONSCIOUSNESS (“the state or faculty of being conscious, as a condition and concomitant of all thought, feeling, and volition,” “the recognition by the thinking subject of its own acts or affections”); TRANCE (“an unconscious or insensible condition; a swoon, a faint, [...] a state characterized by a more or less prolonged suspension of consciousness and inertness to stimulus; a cataleptic or hypnotic condition”<sup>67</sup>) + ATTENTION (“earnest direction of the mind, consideration, or regard,” “the

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masturbation, titillating their psychic organisms into pitches of mindless excitement; cavorting in orgasms of self-surrender. They bask in a sort of universal steam bath that drives all impurities of individuality or creativity from their souls, leaving them immersed, supposedly forever, in a bliss beyond description; in which, indeed, their own experience disappears. “Thank God that some god managed to disentangle itself from such psychic oneness, if that’s what it’s supposed to be. Thank God that some god loved itself enough to diversify, to create itself in a million different forms; to multiply, to explode its being inward and outward. Thank God that some god loved its own individuality enough to endow the least and the most, the greatest and smallest, with its own unique being.

“The gurus say, ‘Give it all up.’ One of those we read about counsels: ‘When you want to do one thing, do another instead. Do not do what you want to do, but what you should do’ Never trust the self that you are, the gurus say, but the self you should be. And that self is supposed to be dead to desire, beyond wanting or caring; yet paradoxically, this nonfeeling leads to bliss. The gurus say that All That Is is within you, yet tell you not to trust yourself. If All That Is didn’t want appearances, we wouldn’t experience any! Yet appearances, the gurus say, are untruths, changing and therefore false.

“Is my body an appearance, hence an untruth amid the truth which is changeless? Ah dear body, then, how lovely and blessed your untruth, which is sensate and feels desire through the hollowest [sic] of bones. How blessed, bodies, leaping alive from the microscopic molecules that combine to walk down the autumn streets; assemble to form the sweet senses’ discrimination that perceives, for a time, the precise joy and unity of even one passing afternoon. The body’s untruth, then, is holier than all truths, and if the body is an untruth then I hereby proclaim untruth, and truth and all the guru’s truths as lies.

“God knows itself through the flesh. God may know itself through a million or a thousand million other worlds, as so may I—but because this world is, and because I am alive in it, it is more than appearance, more than a shackle to be thrown aside. It is a privilege to be here, to look out with this unique focus, with these individual eyes; not to be blinded by cosmic vision, but to see this corner of reality...

“Cherish the gifts of the gods. Don’t be so anxious to throw your individuality back into their faces, saying ‘I’m sick to death of myself and my individuality; it burdens me. Even one squirrel’s consciousness, suddenly thrown into the body of another of its kinds, would feel a sense of loss, encounter a strangeness, and know in the sacredness of its being that something was wrong. Wear your individuality proudly. It is the badge of your godhood. You are a god living a life—being, desiring, creating.”

<sup>66</sup> The limits of my own knowledge prevented me from drawing a comparison between Jane and Vedic or Buddhist texts. The book-version of this dissertation will take up the issue of her relation to “Eastern” religion through a consideration of how mysticism is, as such, a specifically modern *problem* concerning language and thus knowledge, whether in Christianity or Islam, and how this may in fact make a truly mystical engagement with these traditions extremely difficult. See on this point Michel de Certeau, “Mystique,” in *Le Lien de l’Autre: Histoire Religieuse et Mystique* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> But also (a definition that captures her understanding of trance) “an intermediate state between sleeping and waking; half-conscious or half-awake condition; a stunned or dazed state; a state of mental abstraction from external things; absorption, exaltation, rapture, ecstasy.”

mental power or faculty of attending”). The neologisms, it should be noted, even place more weight on the side of themselves not traditionally associated with the essence or basic character of the matter they define (the other is made, for example, the position or essence of consciousness). Noticing the obvious affinity between these terms and the similar constructions deconstruction relied on for conveying the original reversibility (itself such a construction) of conceptual distinctions within and at the source of Western philosophy (“archiwriting,” “hauntologie”) suggests the latter can somehow provide an appropriate context or comparison for Jane. Perhaps, we begin to think, Jane was unable to abide standard terminology from being in sharp conflict with some of the (still persistent) basics of Western conceptuality, and juxtaposing her texts with some primary instances of the latter is what will expose their significance.

Sensing this at first has us engaged in a difficult, almost random search for a canonical thinker or text whose definition of the psyche or the self still exerts enough (covert) cultural hold to have been what she was unwittingly fighting against with her own. Reading in Plotinus, Augustine, and Descartes results in some worthwhile connections, but their own problems are often too complex or precise to be easily matched with one as simple as Jane’s. Yet just when this route is also appearing to go nowhere, it leads right to a location in thought that while obvious, was hiding in plain view: the moment when the terms up for discussion in Jane most likely first get set. Witnessing it anew finally makes the specificity of the meaning she ascribes them clear...

The event suddenly now in question is the definition of the psyche given in Plato’s *Phaedo* (“On the Soul” to ancients), which is also often taken as the first enunciation of the basic Western conception of self or personal identity. In the course of elaborating a proof for its immortality, Socrates is famously asked by his interlocutors whether the psyche (even if it preexists, as he argues, physical life) could be “dispersed” upon death and therefore mortal. After pinpointing the crux of the problem in the issue of whether the psyche is something “composite” that can be “scattered,” Plato-as-Socrates offers a series of arguments against the prospect that conclude with this statement:

it follows from all that has been said that the psyche is most like the divine, it is deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, always the same as itself, whereas the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, soluble, and never consistently the same. [...] Well then, that being so, is it not natural for the body to dissolve easily and for the soul to be altogether indissoluble?<sup>68</sup>

While the question most at stake here is that of the immortality and non-corporeality of the psyche, the issue of whether it could be composite is neither merely a subordinate one nor of small significance. The passage, some of the authorities agree, sets in motion (or at least expresses the beginnings of) the long history of the psyche qua a self-identical unity always above or capable of overcoming plurality and change, and at the same time also shuts off the other potential routes it could have taken had prior, prescientific understandings of it remained viable. This is to say that

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<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* (Indianapolis: Hackett 2002), 119. Hereafter cited as *P*.



this declaration of the “uniform”—not “multiform”—character of the psyche is as much the finalization of the disappearance of a more archaic Greek self whose essential form is a “plurality of loci” as it is the inauguration of the form of “unicity” that only starts to be destabilized with modernity. The idea of “Homeric man,” as Taylor puts it, as “a being whose parts are more evident than the whole” and where “sudden, unexpected accesses of [divine] energy” are common goes extinct upon the rise of this unified, Platonic psyche.<sup>69</sup>

... Set against the backdrop of this foundational characterization of the psyche, Jane’s own appears an attempt to express in precise terms a thought it precludes and that has consequently been for a long time almost inconceivable. Whatever the differences between the present and Plato’s Greece, the equation of self with a (uniform) unicity opposed to (multiform) plurality remains such a bedrock element of Western intellectual thought that it goes almost entirely unquestioned, and attempts to reformulate the relation between these terms thus remain only the undertakings of outliers.<sup>70</sup> Discovering that a plural self lies on the hither side of the beginnings of metaphysics allows the odd notions of one just seen emerging upon the latter’s breakup to be understood as freeing this potential after the formula’s long suppression of it, and the work of other strange writers like Jane—poets like Fernando Pessoa and James Merrill now come to mind—as first attempts to recast it. The

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<sup>69</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 118–119. It has been, Taylor states there, “remarked on [that there is] an absence in Homer of words that could happily be translated by our ‘mind,’ or even by ‘soul’ in its standard post-Platonic meaning, that is, a term designating the unique locus where all of our different thoughts and feelings occur. Homeric psyche seems to designate something like the life force in us, what flees from the body at death, rather than the site of thinking and feeling. If one asks ‘where’ such things go on in Homer’s account of his heroes, no single answer can be given. Rather there seems to us to be a fragmentation: some things happen in the *thumos*, others in the *phrenes*, other again in the *kradie*, *etor*, or *ker*, still others in the *noos*. Some of these sites can be loosely identified with bodily locations; for instance, *keradie*, *etor*, and *ker* seem to be identified with the heart, and *phrenes* with the lungs. [...] In parallel to the multiplicity of ‘mind’ locations, bodily references are also usually to what we would think of as parts. The term ‘soma,’ Snell argues, refers to the corpse. References to the living body are to e.g., the ‘limbs,’ ‘skin,’ etc., varying as appropriate with the context.

“Snell also noted that the Homeric hero was frequently carried to the greatest heights of actions by a surge of power infused into him by a god. And indeed, the same could be said of some of his greatest mistakes. Agamemmon excuses his unfair and unwise treatment of Achilles by referring to the “madness” (*menos*) visited on him by the god. But contrary to our modern intuitions, this doesn’t seem to lessen the merit or demerit attaching to the agent. A great hero remains great, though his impressive deeds are powered by the god’s infusion of energy. Indeed, there is no concession here; it is not that the hero remains great despite the divine help. It is an inseparable part of his greatness that he is such a locus of divine action.

“As Snell puts it, Homeric man is revealed ‘as a being whose parts are more evident than the whole, and one very conscious of sudden, unexpected accesses of energy.’ To the modern [person], this fragmentation, and the seeming confusion about merit and responsibility, are very puzzling. [...] [But] [w]hat this vocabulary betokens [...] is a quite different notion of moral sources, of where one has to go to accede to moral power.”

<sup>70</sup> Antonio Damasio, whose work is perhaps exemplary of inventive theoretical reflection that nonetheless does not profoundly question its basis in Western metaphysics, expresses the widespread understanding that it is completely self-evident that the self is always basically and finally unitary and can only correspond to one body. “For every person you know, there is a body. You may never have given any thought to the simple relationship, but there it is: one person, one body; one mind, one body—a first principle. You have never met a person without a body. Nor have you met a person with two bodies or with multiple bodies, not even Siamese twins. It just does not happen. You may have met, or heard about, bodies inhabited by more than one person, a pathological condition known as multiple personality disorder [...] Even then, however, the principle is not quite violated since, at each given time, only among the multiple identities can use the body to think and behave, only one at a time gains enough control to be a person and express itself [...]” See *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 2000), 142–143. The significance of the fact that it is Damasio making this point—and the implications for contemporary continental philosophy—will be dealt with here in the book version of this dissertation.

import of “other-consciousness” and the “multiperson” (or of Pessoa’s “multiplied self”) could in fact be that they switch the very terms typically ascribed and opposed to the self and through that, as she says, quite literally “transform” it, its uniform form becoming a “multiform.”

Continuing to scrutinize this juxtaposition of texts and forms makes apparent, moreover, how the polymorphic psyche might say what the old concept of psyche tried to but never could. The prospect of this other psyche now on the table, another text of Plato’s that has been waiting nearby comes to life and exposes the often veiled fact that Western conceptuality also contains its own notion of psychic plurality...

The *Republic*’s further specification of the definition of the psyche offered in *Phaedo* very quickly leads to its being carved up right after its unification and in a fashion subordinate to this. The initial discussions of justice or *dike* as a proper proportion between the rational, spirited, and desiring parts of the *polis* is followed by the arguments in Book 4 in which Plato endeavors to demonstrate the presence of the same tripartite structure in the psyche and thus the presumed homology between the individual and the social body. Plato’s response to the question of whether learning, “spirit,” and desire are functions of the whole of the psyche or only corresponding components of it—“do we do [these] different things with different elements” of ourselves or “with our entire soul?”—is that reason and desire are distinct in nature (one is privative, the other affirmative) and that they also are often expressly in conflict with each other such that neither can be equated with the psyche as such.<sup>71</sup> Since it is not, he states, “possible for one thing, in the same part of itself, with respect to the same object, to be at the same time in two opposite states, or to be or to do two opposite things,” the psyche cannot reason and desire from the same place in itself and is therefore composed of distinct parts corresponding to these two “psychological” activities as well as to “spirit.” The psyche, it turns out, was already split at the start.

This plural psyche, then, could indeed be read as exposing an originary divisibility of self: a vestige of Homeric plurilocality—Odysseus beating his chest and rebuking his heart—is even treated as both evidence for the tripartite structure and an example of “the sort of conversation the soul has with itself when the rational part tries to get the others under control” (“as if it were one thing talking to another one”). Yet this psychic partitioning is not profound inasmuch as Plato presumes that reconciling the resultant elements is always possible and that reason—which is thus dubbed “the true self”—is the agency capable of this. In other words, the form of the Platonic psyche lies in only one of its components, and the other, inessential parts are attributed to it on the basis of the unification of this element and the identification of it with the self.

What Jane, then, is undoing (without entirely knowing it) is not only the equation of the psyche with unity but also the ersatz plurality ascribed it on the basis of this. She revives, in other words, the plurality that might have been there from the start.

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<sup>71</sup> Plato, *Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 131.

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After wondering how far such a comparison could really go and then discovering Jane to be comprehensive enough to warrant at least this much of it—a book of hers called *Psychic Politics* even sees her grappling with the implications a multiplied psyche holds for the socius—the status of both “Plato” and this interpretation dawns on us. Instead of being the author of works Jane’s could be immediately “read” against, he is simply the first to formulate conceptions of the psyche and self that primarily belong to the large, main lines of the Western intellectual and cultural tradition that so faithfully reproduced them that they still appear largely self-evident. *Phaedo* and *Republic* make for such a worthwhile contrast because they contain definitions repeated throughout Western letters (Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine are now entering the fringes...) but neither they nor any other discrete work by an individual author really offers Jane’s discursive context for the simple reason that it lies in the large currents of Western letters of which these are a part. This thought then directs us to consider what now finally seems like the most appropriate means of interpreting Jane’s psyche: some reading and comparison having delivered a sense of its novelty, the next step would be to track the history of how the uniform psyche it breaks with could have come enough into question to allow for its renewed expression of “plurilocality.” Initial work in this direction would show that both the spirit mediumship and multiple personality of the nineteenth century became conceivable and socially viable once religion and science no longer considered the soul sacrosanct and could thus begin to divide it, and further reveal that prior resurgences of self-plurality in medieval and early modern outbreaks of demonic possession were intolerable to a theology still invested in it. Seeing that the significance of Jane’s self-multiplicity lies in its bearing on the tension between the two psyches also sends us, at last, to the recent past and whatever she might have been responding to in calling for a “transformation” of the current form of self. Further research—now of what is considered a distinctly anthropological kind—soon shows that a form of spirit mediumship very close to and often explicitly modeled on Jane’s (it was called “channeling”) attained significant popularity in the United States during the 1980’s and 1990’s, and that its practitioners even believed the self to be undergoing a crisis in Western societies that would require both its pluralization (through meditation) and the formation of a corresponding social bond.<sup>72</sup>

After all this, Jane’s writings and concepts might finally be grasped as attempts to formulate in more or less precise terms a plural self quite different from the one typical of modern societies but that has slowly emerged at their edges. Authored from the midpoint, it would seem, of a vernacular religious discourse and the intellectual knowledge and institutions the former would have to unseat if its vision of the self were to become actual, her concepts attempt to do what it cannot. Understanding them would require, then, engaging not only the science or philosophy they are in disagreement with but the popular practices they both spring from and shape, the history of the psyche these in turn come from, and the current situation of the modern self.

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<sup>72</sup> Prior to and while writing the present work, I engaged in extensive “fieldwork” with such channels. The reasons why I chose to devote an entire text to Roberts before turning to this research will emerge in the course of the present work. I want, though, to state at the outset that my understanding of Jane’s thought and “psychology” would not have been possible had I not learned what I did about self and consciousness through my fieldwork (even if focusing on the latter would have occluded the concepts and theory I am trying to develop here).

But even if outlining it has told us more about Jane, is the last approach really so germane? Would finding a metaphysical context for her thoughts only be a prelude to the ostensibly more fundamental work of locating it historically?

The distinctly conceptual character of so many of her thoughts not being in doubt, the assumption that their importance lies primarily in how they bear on a sociohistorical and political situation they ostensibly could not exceed seems more prejudice and reflex than insight. Automatically reducing her phrases like to elements of a broader discourse, itself conceived only in relation to a “concrete” sociopolitical situation, occludes the (theoretical, metaphysical, and speculative) generality of the claims they make on the real and the precise reasoning from which they result. Although obviously formulated in a far less consistent or exact intellectual manner, the other psyche is just as much as Plato’s an idea hit upon through noticing the discrepancy between a perception (‘I’ happen twiceover at once in a trance) and the terms ordinarily applying to its object (unity, simplicity, and ) and then reformulating the latter, and yet critical anthropology’s insistence on subjecting it to the “sociohistorical reduction” leaves it unable to discern such a line of thought or the character of its results. Terms like “other-consciousness” and “multiperson” are in fact performative or creative thoughts in a very specific sense, and deserve to be treated as such. As basic characterizations or descriptions of fundamental matters that have been arrived at through a precise line of reasoning (as concepts), such phrases have a degree of autonomy with respect to context to the exact extent that the pattern of meanings they set up (person=multiple / consciousness=other) applies to other issues initially foreign to it (God=multiple) and can accordingly illumine problems associated with them. Not seeing this, critical anthropology instead assumes that such phrases have, as most do, a more or less determinate context, and that their reach could thus not extend past this and into other spheres that they could then effectively redescribe and differently construct. Even were it to recognize (but it rarely does) the ambition of speculative thought to produce thoughts this transposable and thus refinable, “anthropology” (meaning, again, both a discipline and a larger critical endeavor of which it is often a part) would consider this an impossible project because of the profound differences across the historical contexts it would apply to. Concepts would scarcely have any right to be concepts.

While the perspicuity of this view cannot be treated here, its uselessness for assessing concepts (at least in this sense) must be. Going back to the moment in our analysis that came right before the sociohistorical reduction presented itself makes this quite evident. The place in *Republic* when the psyche is given a plural form subsidiary to the uniformity attributed it both there and in *Phaedo* hinges on the application to it of an apparently indisputable (and thoroughly metaphysical) claim—it is not “possible for one thing [...] to be at the same time in two opposite states, or to be or to do two opposite things”—that also happens to be considered by some one of the first expressions of the principle of non-contradiction. Although it is rarely characterized as such, the definition of self and psyche in Plato also plays a key role, then, in establishing one of the core logical bases of rational thought, the presence of it in language, and the homology or (literal) conformity between sensed reality and the latter Plato’s statement presumes. Now unless one considers merely fortuitous or coincidental the fact this first or proto- instance of the principle of noncontradiction is brought into play in order to establish that distinct identities have to be ascribed to the parts of a psyche that is nevertheless ultimately one (as reason or in its “true self”), these passages ought to be acknowledged as establishing in Occidental thinking both a profound conceptual bond or equation between self and (simple) logical identity, and

through that a corresponding form for making intelligible the obvious duplicity or plurality entailed by any self-relation. Self will henceforth in essence be a simple unity (“I and I” does not encapsulate its form), and thoughts or impulses differing from its own will be attributed to distinct agencies that are discrete parts of a psyche (or self-complex) but not equivalent to its essence. Even when the bond or equation is not assumed to be infrangible, the form of plurality that corresponds to it mostly remains in place: casting the psyche as consciousness and the unconscious or as ego and desire may render the identities of its parts more porous, but it also assigns one term to the position of essence and makes the identity of the other depend or derive from it.

Confronted with a conceptual formula so close to us that it seems unquestionable, sociohistorical analysis proves quite feeble. Not granting that such a configuration of logic, language, self, and plurality could hold across and determine different epochs—changing institutional and cultural conditions would supposedly deprive it of that power—such analysis lacks the means for discerning how Plato expresses and perhaps institutes one. Were it, moreover, to concede for some reason the possibility of such a bond, it would nonetheless be unable to locate a definite place where its terms remains tied together in culture and that would make their relation amenable to analysis. Fieldwork alone, even “in philosophy,” would not do the trick.

On the other hand, simply attempting to understand Jane’s claims about the psyche led us straight into Plato’s while at the same time providing us with a perspective on him that would not otherwise have been likely. Because her concepts indeed pattern basic intellectual meaning and are indeed thus concepts, they are capable of both exposing how Plato continues to exercise power over thinking and of reformulating the terms through which he does this (only they have to be read as concepts). They even identify the location—language—through which this happens. While not contending with the principle of contradiction or precise aspects of Plato (but neither would anthropology), she nonetheless addresses how language contains a conception of identity that would have, moreover, to be discarded or revised were another form of self to become recognizable. “Words in a language,” we find her alter ego saying, “function not only by defining what a specific object is... but also by defining what it is not”<sup>73</sup> such that “our idea of identity is like a magic circle we’ve drawn around our minds, so that everything outside seems dark and alien, unselflike.”<sup>74</sup> Perceiving a mode of self not subject to such an identity therefore requires “breaking up the automatic patterning of familiar phrases” (which goes so far as to “structure the visual perception of objects”), and “Seth” recommends exercises for this that can “set up a new kind of relationship between the perceiver and the perceived.”<sup>75</sup> While this perspective about language is itself not enough to undo the equation of self and identity it in fact disputes, it gets further in challenging this bond than would attention to the sociohistorical “concrete,” and this becomes exceedingly clear as many of Jane’s prior

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<sup>73</sup> UR, 458.

<sup>74</sup> UR, xxv.

<sup>75</sup> UR, 460. “Part of the unknown reality, then, is hidden beneath language and the enforced pattern of accustomed words—so, for an exercise, look about your environment. Make up new, different ‘words’ for the objects that you see about you. Pick up any object, for example. Hold it for a few seconds, feel its texture, look at its color, and spontaneously give it a new name by uttering the sounds that come into your mind. See how the sounds bring out certain aspects of the object that you may have not noticed before [...]. You can [also] instead say the name of any object backwards. In such ways you break up to some extent the automatic patterning of familiar phrases.”

utterances come rushing back to us. Since language can for the most part only conceal the mode of self of the trance, she locates the latter well outside it—in time itself.

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But realizing, finally, that her writings themselves call for reading (and not sociohistorical reduction) does not, however, dissolve the issue of their context. Just when we discover that understanding her eccentric metaphysics requires juxtaposing it with metaphysics proper, the question of Jane's relation to the deconstruction and rethinking of metaphysics with which she is in such strong resonance insistently imposes itself. Since her attempt to think a plural self is an avowed attempt to critique and transform a fundamental (her terms) "metaphysical idea," what is her relation to those very attempts—Deleuze's and Derrida's—to make multiplicity and difference the basis of "being"?

Sociohistorical analysis no longer distracting us from them, both Jane's texts and such questions can again emerge. Feeling compelled to examine the manuscript that prompted "Seth's" discussions of the psyche from above, we turn to the actual text of *The Afterdeath Journal of an American Philosopher* and find Jane reiterating in its introduction the questions the text raised for her and Rob—"Did I suppose that a William James, a discarnate person, was sitting at a celestial desk somewhere, speaking through mentally sophisticated dictaphone equipment—namely me?" ("No, no, no")—and then expanding on Seth's discussions of "other-consciousness" by way of response...<sup>76</sup>

"I explain the entire affair to myself as follows," she writes. "James' reality still exists. It can be tuned into, and when this happens, the information comes alive through us, mixes with the contents of our minds, and interacts with them so that a... creative synthesis is formed."<sup>77</sup>

"My own experience shows me," she continues, "that the boundaries of the self are of a stranger nature than supposed. They shift, opening up other areas of subjective thought... as if any personality following a journey through his own reality would encounter other, quite-as-valid selves, each with its own existence, and ultimately find within that vast psychological structure the reflection of every other person alive on our planet in this or any other time... Each person is reflected in every other, and through the creative process [of writing, etc.] we can and often do open doors leading to experiences that 'are not our own'; writing from a viewpoint that is someone else's, living or dead, and viewing reality from a completely different standpoint."<sup>78</sup>

In a second introduction to the book, she says, now as "Seth," that because "all consciousness is interrelated" this way, "each person's experience becomes part of a psychic bank... a heritage from which each person draws not only before birth but also at any point during life."<sup>79</sup> Every identity is thus "composed of myriad fragments

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<sup>76</sup> ADJ, 15.

<sup>77</sup> ADJ, 16.

<sup>78</sup> ADJ, 17.

<sup>79</sup> ADJ, 7.

of other identities” (“bits of consciousness” that “mix and match to form your psychological being”) and is “filled with multitudinous alteration and change” as more fragments cluster together with it and others “fall away” and are “used by others.”<sup>80</sup> Since “nothing is lost that has gone before,” “there is indeed an ‘archaeology’ of the self, in which the consciousness of the past and present merge” and this is why “William James’ consciousness can be reflected through Jane’s, shining with a different case, henceforth forming a new combination”—“his unanswered questions sifted through another unique consciousness, so that they are given a different slant.”<sup>81</sup>

Intuiting that Jane’s obsession with time and events perhaps indicates that this reference to a “merging” of past and present carries a precise meaning for her, we search this text and others for a clue to it and finally find one in some chapters from a text called *Adventures in Consciousness*. In these, Jane explicitly ties both the psychic bank and the merger to a discussion of time that verges on being ontological...

“Alien personality characteristics” or “traces of others” can sometimes be seen coming through the (then “displaced”) self, she says, because the past itself is the psychic bank and is therefore neither fixed nor stable.<sup>82</sup> “Ordinary events,” she writes, “have a sharp focus only because we experience such a small part of their reality—the part that surfaces.”<sup>83</sup> Beneath their phenomenality, though, “events occur in a stratum that remains invisible but ever shifting”—“a suspended potential field” composed as much of “events that might have happened otherwise” and “other lines of development” (belonging to other people) as those events “actualized” in a life and thus remembered.<sup>84</sup> What each person draws from this domain are in fact memories, which she sees as “endowing the moment with additional dimensions of events not present in sense terms,”<sup>85</sup> meaning, in other words, the context for an experience. Yet since the past these come from is everyone’s, it is possible to draw other people’s experiences, or “aspects,” from it and not just one’s own. This frequently occurs below the threshold of perception—“usually aspects slide transparently through the personality, merely coloring or tinting its visions”<sup>86</sup>—but “we can accelerate, direct it, and deliberately actualize more... aspects”<sup>87</sup> so that these enter the self as the “alien personality characteristics”<sup>88</sup> of trances, or even new, previously unencountered memories.

Such alterations of the past, moreover, are also possible because “time is not a series of moments” or “horizontal spread” but “the point of intersection”—a sort of

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<sup>80</sup> *ADJ*, 9-10.

<sup>81</sup> *ADJ*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> *AC*, 101.

<sup>83</sup> *AC*, 135.

<sup>84</sup> *AC*, 114.

<sup>85</sup> *AC*, 127.

<sup>86</sup> *AC*, 108.

<sup>87</sup> *AC*, 96.

<sup>88</sup> *AC*, 101.

“kink”—between the potential field and material actuality.<sup>89</sup> Although “this meeting is an opaque one” in most circumstances (witnessing it would make past and present alike unsure), “by realizing this and placing ourselves at that intersection point, we can... unkink ourselves” so that a plurality of self, and an instant composed of other instants, becomes possible.<sup>90</sup>

... Jane’s temporalization of her psychology directly points to the philosopher she shared, while never knowing it, the greatest affinity with—Deleuze—who in turn clears up an inchoate aspect of the above fragments. Her seemingly insane assertion that each person has an immediate mnemonic link to the entirety of the past and can thus alter his or her own is also, as his readers know, one on which Deleuze rests much of his thinking.

What this (suddenly proper) philosopher holds in common with Jane is not just a conception of the individual qua multiplicity but the understanding that this plurality lies for the most part outside the present. The elements of Deleuze’s work to which this thought immediately sends us are the discussions, in *Cinema 2*, of the images of time that result from peering, as a “seer” or “visionary” would, into a “crystal,” at the same intersection of past and present with which Jane is concerned. What she is witnessing, Deleuze would or perhaps in fact does say about her here, is the point at which these two sides of time become indistinguishable from each other and where the past’s multiplicity and radical noncorrespondence to the present can, on that basis, be exposed.

Such a point can be seen, go these analyses (which are well-known enough that they need only be adumbrated), as a result of three paradoxes intrinsic to time...

Because the present, first, is passing at the same time as it is present—whenever we say “right now,” this “right now” is also “just now”—present and past in fact occur simultaneously or even in reverse. “If it,” Deleuze in fact says of the present, “was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on,” and therefore “the past does not follow the present that it is no longer, [but] coexists with the present it was.”<sup>91</sup> On account of this contemporaneousness, the past can furthermore be said even to pre-exist the present: not only does it have to be there already for the present to pass, but we are forced to presuppose it when engaged in memory, since no moment can happen without the past (“the past appears [...] as a pre-existence in general, which our recollections presuppose, even our first recollection if there was one, and which our perceptions, even the first, makes use of”<sup>92</sup>).

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<sup>89</sup> *AC*, 97.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 97. Hereafter cited as *C2*. The full version of this passage runs as follows. “What is actual is always a present. But, then, precisely, the present changes or passes. We can always say that it becomes past when it no longer is, when a new present replaces it. But this is meaningless. It is clearly necessary for it to pass on for the present to arrive, and it is clearly necessary for it to pass at the same time as it is present, at the moment that it is the present. Thus the image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time. If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on. The past [therefore] does not follow the present that it is no longer, it [instead] coexists with the present it was.”

<sup>92</sup> *C2*, 98.



Once time is seen to be organized this way, Deleuze continues, memory (in the psychological sense) has to be understood as sharing in this structure: since each person, as an instance of the present, is at once in this present and in the past and thus also first his or her past, memory, too, cannot be located only in the present but must have a side quite literally in (that simply is) the past. “Pure recollection”—the name given the nonpresent part of memory—“exists outside consciousness, in time, and we should have no problem admitting [...] pure recollections in time than we do for actual existence of non-perceived objects in space

Just as we perceive things in the place where they are and have to place ourselves among things in order to perceive them, we go to look for recollection in the place where it is, we have to place ourselves with a leap into the past in general, into [...] images which have been constantly preserved through time. It is in the past as it is in itself, as it is preserved in itself, that we go to look for our dreams or our recollections, and not the opposite.<sup>93</sup>

The primary (and celebrated) consequence being that these “virtual” aspects of the past or recollections are entirely different in kind from empirical memories and must for that reason be translated into the form of the latter to be made conscious. Since all events in the past literally coincide with each other, memory of any one of them would be impossible were there no means for filtering the rest, and the mind does this by linking with the “immediate” past simultaneous with itself—the past “specific” to it yet “nonetheless part of the past in general”—and referencing present perceptions against it so that they become intelligible. (Being almost entirely the same as the “just now,” the “right now” loses the unique and thus incomprehensible character it would otherwise have.) This “coalescence” of the present with the immediate past keeps the rest of the past well at the periphery of the present and thus bars irrelevant aspects of the past from becoming mixed or confused with it or the empirical memories formed from there.

The coalescence, however, also has the additionally paradoxical effect of putting the past back into the present right as the present is going into the past, and this “exchange” or (in Jane’s idiom) “intersection” is the point at which they become indistinguishable from each other. Although connecting to the immediate past is what enables the present to stand out as itself and not be confused with the whole past, it also results in the immediate past’s actualization as the conscious, empirical image of the present: the “just now” again becomes the “right now” by virtue of furnishing the latter with an intelligibility or idea almost identical to it and that consciousness therefore takes for the present. But because the present nonetheless also passes while being so illumined, it ends up in the position of the past drawn from for that purpose at the very instant this (piece of the) past is being brought into the present. And since the same fate of going to the past is reserved for this new present (and so on), this trading of places never comes to a close and even amounts

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<sup>93</sup> C2, 80.

in that way to the constitution of time.<sup>94</sup> Now while this process ordinarily remains veiled, Deleuze stresses (following Bergson) that it can to some extent be perceived when one becomes aware, in “the illusion of déjà-vu or already having been there” (the sense that the now has already happened), of “the recollection of the present” that is the piece of the past “contemporaneous with the present itself.”<sup>95</sup> “Whoever becomes conscious,” he says with Bergson, “of the constant reduplicating of his present into perception and recollection... will compare himself to an actor playing his part automatically, listening to himself and beholding himself playing,” as witnessing the coalescence in himself of time’s two sides makes it impossible to distinguish between them such that one will also seem at once both oneself and the immediate past making one intelligible—the likeness and “reversibility” between them making the self seem a confusion of “role and actor.”<sup>96</sup>

Paramnesia of this sort—catching a glimpse of the simultaneity of past and present and losing from that the ability to distinguish them—is precisely what reveals the form of time just sketched and thus clarifies the nature of Jane’s intuition of it. When past and present, Deleuze claims, are seen coalesced or “crystallized” together, the one perceiving this is witnessing the very constitution of time into virtual (or potential) and actual and thus also the status of the former as the “soul” or “spirit” on the other side of phenomenality. Jane, literally being such a “visionary,” could intuit this structure of time and the real—recall her sense of a “kinking” of potential and actual—and access other aspects of the past in the mediumistic fashion she does. This is possible, Deleuze says (as he also almost certainly would have of her), because swathes of the past not immediately relevant to or translatable into the present can overwhelm and displace it once a window onto time has been opened. When Jane is “channeling” James or Seth or the other members of her cohort, she is basically reaching through the window toward “sheets” of the past so incompatible with each other and so foreign to her own that “they can no longer be evoked” in empirical memories.

It is as if the past surfaces in itself, but in the shape of personalities which are independent, alienated, off-balance, embryonic... and autonomous. Not recollections but hallucinations. Madness, the split personality now shows the past. [...] Personalities emanate from [different] regions of the past, haunting different places which are now only stages in the exploration of time.<sup>97</sup>

The past or virtual, that is, sticks through the window (which is a “direct presentation of time”), “detaches itself from its actualizations, starts to be valid for itself,”<sup>98</sup> and consequently unleashes aspects of itself that cannot be reconciled with the present (James past is not hers) or else are of an “undecidable” validity because

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<sup>94</sup> Time is constituted by this for Deleuze because, first, a perception can only be maintained for so long before expiring, and when this happens it—the present—passes, constituting more past. But the proximate and simultaneous part of the past drawn from to lend context or intelligibility (the latter being a deliberate word-choice on my part) to this same present is also thereby sent into the present as that present passes, which in turn gives us more present.

<sup>95</sup> C2, 79.

<sup>96</sup> C2, 79.

<sup>97</sup> C2, 117.

<sup>98</sup> C2, 127.

they contradict each other and are therefore “not necessarily true.”<sup>99</sup> In either event, the subject, unable to experience these pasts, can only bring them forward by becoming displaced by different personas corresponding to them—“an irreducible multiplicity.”<sup>100</sup>

... Much of what we have seen of Jane would seem to confirm this interpretation and thus specify her relation to metaphysics. Both her obsession with time and the weird self-pluralization she uses to contend with it would seem clarified.

Yet the most crucial part of her thinking—the psyche as another or “other” consciousness—remains unexplained in this account. Although she, too, recognizes that ordinary consciousness must be “displaced” if other times and events are to come through the individual, she neither regards the resulting personas as “autonomous” nor believes them entirely “split” off from the self with which they instead merge. In fact, Jane goes so far as to say that it is (altered) consciousness and (altered) consciousness alone that allow for such accesses to the past, which, moreover, she accordingly treats as events that involve the “blending of past and present” in a way that would be impossible for Deleuze.

Does her divergence from him here really matter, and in what way could it? Bypassing a completely negative response, we can go straight to Deleuze’s (which will be for now be expressed in cursory fashion). While he would acknowledge that she thought, as a vernacular writer, in parallel or tandem with him, he would nonetheless say that she failed by not grasping the following points:

- (1.) There is no consciousness of potentiality, the virtual, “pure” past, and multiplicity. “Consciousness,” as he famously puts it, “becomes a fact only when a subject is produced at the same time as its object. [...] It is expressed, in fact, only when it is reflected on a subject that refers it to objects.”<sup>101</sup>
- (2.) Although there is nonetheless a perception of multiplicity—“molecular perception”—it can only, for the above reason, produce a sensible form that “imitates” ontological plurality (which thereby remains transcendental).
- (3.) Past and present cannot merge or fuse, as the constitution of time is “a dividing in two that the crystal constantly causes to turn on itself, that it prevents from reaching completion, because it is perpetual self-distinguishing [...] which always resumes the distinct terms in itself, in order to constantly relaunch them.”<sup>102</sup>

Although this response to Jane might not be very contemporary (philosophy has moved on), it would seem to provide a more viable account of how a multiplicity of self might be possible than her own by keeping it exactly where it would be expected to be: outside consciousness. Yet just to accept (as many people still would), despite all the foregoing evidence to the contrary, that Jane’s thinking is not coherent enough to warrant keeping it outside Deleuze’s would be to presume that it was scarcely at all thinking and could for that reason simply be submitted to a philosophical reduction symmetrical with its sociohistorical reduction. As if her statements provide neither a means nor a motive for rethinking this line between possibility and actuality.

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<sup>99</sup> C2, 131.

<sup>100</sup> C2, 133.

<sup>101</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Pure Immanence,” in *Immanence: A Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 26.

<sup>102</sup> C2, 82.

If the opposite is to emerge as the case, we will have to show not only that Jane is as commensurate with Deleuze as we just did but also that she in fact addresses (whether on her own or through us as her means) his own claim that the fusion of the self, in its actuality, with its other potentials is neither possible nor desirable. Her vision of myriad actualities that are interconnected despite their divergence will have to be shown to be only at first a confirmation of an ontology of “disjunctive synthesis” and afterward much more a provocation to understand how what is disjunct can instead converge as—a “plural”—one...

Some of Jane’s statements indeed confirm Deleuze’s understanding of the real as radical temporal divergence and ramification: “all versions and possibilities of each event must be actualized in the limitless multiplication of creativity”; “warping outward from each act are a million openings” such that “any one moment in time, then, is a warp, opening into these other dimensions of actuality, and any one moment can be used a passageway or bridge” because “each probable event is changed by each other probable event,” all of them being “intimately connected”; “all systems are open,” therefore “the physical moment is transparent, though you give it time-solidity.” But at the same time, her claims that consciousness can assume the very form of this divergence so that identity—the self’s own, and with it logical identity as such—becomes plural will have to be shown to provide, however improbably, the key to reinterpreting Deleuze so that another ontology becomes possible.

Consciousness will, once Jane’s understanding of it has been followed all the way, turn out to be the realization (perhaps the truth) of ontological multiplicity.

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After all this, we can understand how a speculative thinking of a God decentralized by the constant event(s) of its re-creation could have resulted from such literal “acts” of mediumship, and thus how its (para-) ontological apprehension of time could so decisively grant a life to the dead (and a deadness to “life”) that it blows apart any fast distinction between them. “God”—“an infinitude of novus actions and events” and “systems of actuality,” which, since “no system is closed,” always to some extent overlap—could be characterized, according to a phrase offered by her version of “William James,” as a “MULTIEVENT” precisely because channeling her personas forced her to understand herself, then every self and each thing, as a “multiperson” or (as she also called it) “multidimensional personality” in which different “times” or instants of time converge while remaining somehow apart. Getting, at last, that she could see, like the “real” William James, God as multiple (James’ name for this was “plural universe”) because self and consciousness had become for her a “PSYCHOLOGICAL MULTIEVENT” allows us, too, to grant that the automatic writings of her “unreal” James could simultaneously contain a concept of time. The un- or incredible character of the postmortem descriptions, come from this James, of “how my experience of time is different from yours”<sup>103</sup> (“I view it as you might an unclear movie in which time sequences jumble, the speed is uncertain, and there are bleed-throughs

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<sup>103</sup> *AJ*, 119.

from one picture to another”<sup>104</sup>) now emerge as the condition of the rigor and seriousness of “his” declarations that “the division between the living and nonliving has little meaning,”<sup>105</sup> “the thoughts of the living and dead flow through each other,”<sup>106</sup> and “the traces of [a finished] life still intersect with and affect those living”—such “lifetracks” appearing to the living “brighter and of greater intensity than those of the dead” even though, “in actuality, often the intensity of certain thoughts and emotions of the latter is so strong that they remain highly volatile.”<sup>107</sup> Statements that lead (should you continue) to another notion of time, and thus even a sense, which only Jane’s James can give us, of a different kind of “philosophy.”<sup>108</sup>

Before more of her thoughts can begin to take us there, though, we have to return quickly to the question of the status of this “philosophy” with respect to metaphysics. If its understanding of time effectively blurs the line ostensibly separating past from present, potential and actual, and the living and the dead, wouldn’t that effectively make it a weird case or expression of the deconstruction of the metaphysics that kept these terms discretely apart? Wouldn’t her attempt to bespeak their simultaneity really be, if one looked at it more closely, much more an affirmation of paradox or aporia than a theoretical consciousness of their joining together into a novel phenomenal form? And inasmuch as it was the latter, wouldn’t her writing be the self’s resistance, which can never finally be overcome, to its own alterity and deconstruction?

Little doubt should be left that we are in orbit of a weird assault on some of the core oppositions of “metaphysics,” and Jane is, in this respect, an unexpected and most improbable double of a philosopher who sought to determine, since acknowledging the primacy of difference would require it, “how a disparate could still, itself, hold itself together, and if one can ever speak of the disparate itself, selfsame, of a sameness without property,”<sup>109</sup> and who did so in works devoted not just to showing how not to accept “the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal” but rooted in part in its author’s avowedly intimate understanding (which is as yet, I believe, neither completely appreciated nor understood) of the very experiences of trance, possession, haunting, and telepathy at the core of Jane’s thought. And Derrida, moreover, also sharply objected to treating as fixed or insurmountable the difference between virtual and actual that an experience of time like Jane’s exposes before undoing; distinguishing between this pair in principle or merely conceptually proves, by his reckoning, impossible such that their status as actual or potential

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<sup>104</sup> *AJ*, 118.

<sup>105</sup> *AJ*, 119.

<sup>106</sup> *AJ*, 148.

<sup>107</sup> *AJ*, 121.

<sup>108</sup> “I am still philosophically minded,” the undead James says in a chapter about a “A School for Philosophers,” “so I am in direct contact with many philosophers both famous and unknown, most from historical periods other than my own, and many natives of cultures and civilizations that were unknown to me with my stance in the Western world. [...] Some cultures are so different from those I was familiar with that my questions themselves make little sense [...]. I ask one philosopher, for example, ‘Can you explain the social structure that existed in your civilization? The philosopher smiles, wanting to please me with a reply, yet amused by the definite block in his own understanding of my question. I try again. The words ‘social’ and ‘your’ are the culprits. Mentally he sends me images of a world in which there is no word for ‘your,’ but only ‘ours,’ and in which the concept of ‘social’ has a thousand different connotations; a world in which men and animals alike are considered social creatures, intermixing at many levels [...].” *AJ*, 186.

<sup>109</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and The New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York, Routledge: 1994), 19.

cannot be established. “A general conditionality would spread over all certainties” as a result, he says; “this would render them impossible, to the point of rendering their presumed reality simply possible” or “virtual,” and their putative identity, therefore, plural or many.<sup>110</sup>

But assuming on the basis of this proximity that Jane’s concepts could be, yet again, exhausted by or reduced to those of a “real” philosophy would require ignoring the novelty and distinctiveness of her phrases, especially where they announce the realization, in visions as intellectual as they are obviously aesthetic, of plural identity: “my head... fills with vivid scenes”—“hundreds of brilliant scenes; expressions, I knew, of probabilities, ‘past’ and ‘future’ events, sideways events I can’t even understand... all happening at once, with perfect comprehension of that by the ‘anchor’ self”—“*I literally become the experience of being myself contained in all of these selves, while being these selves contained in me,*” and “in at least one of these selves, the knowledge of this entire event comes to consciousness like a half-recalled dream of its own, and *the experience of recalling and being recalled is like liquid electricity in me, the anchor self.*” Would it really be insightful to interpret her characterization of this ecstasy as knowledge and consciousness as the resurgence, at the very moment of its deconstruction, of self-presence? Or to not bother, out of confidence that they do not say anything new, to attend to the specificity of its terms?

The deconstruction of God, psyche, and time set into motion with the advent of the God of Jane entailed, at the same time, their transformation. Witnessing the appearance in her of their changed forms—which were like the split-together vision of an “extra reality over reality”—will allow us, in the end, to see that an identity at once itself and another actually emerged into what then turns out to be another, plural actuality; one wherein potential, actual, and inactual (or possible, imaginary, and real) co-occur as “one” divergent phenomenality. Once its image has come more fully into view, the prospect of this phenomenal form being mere presence or a paradoxical specter will seem quite out of the question, and any remaining confidence about the impossibility of assembling its divergence will give way to our search (which is always simply running after Jane) for an account of how these transformed forms are “possible.”

Of these “MULTIPERSONS,” “TRANSPERSONALITIES,” and “PSYCHOLOGICAL MULTIEVENTS,” the “OTHER-CONSCIOUSNESS,” this “DECENTRALIZED GOD,” these “ACTUALITIES” that are also merely “PROBABILITIES,” this at once solid and wavering image of the “SUPERREAL” and the theory (“ASPECT PSYCHOLOGY”) come from its works, or “THE LIBRARY OF THE SUPERREAL,” and the plural PSYCHE at their fantastic, eccentric origin. A psyche, as its version of its favorite philosopher proffered, of “PSYCHOLOGICAL COMBINATION” and “GROUPINGS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.” Or, now again the “real” William James, a “DIVIDED SELF” that is at the same time “UNIFICATION”—a form reachable only through “MUTATIONS OF SELF” and the “CONVERSION” of consciousness, not the hole put in it by the opening of the unconscious. Terms, all, whose relation to Jane now mark the point of departure for a course of thought in which supposed “gibberish” will be “*turned into a philosophical dialogue.*”

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<sup>110</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (New York: Verso, 1997), 75.

“IN A SENSE, ALL THINGS ARE FRAGMENTS”

*“Other-consciousness,” “probable selves,” a “plural subject”... Despite the fact that philosophy has not yet articulated such concepts, they might still seem to be givens in another context of 20<sup>th</sup>-C. thought: psychoanalysis. In the 1890s, Freud is already writing that the profound role of identification in the unconscious entails the “Multiplicity of Psychological Personalities. The fact of identification perhaps allows us to take the phrase literally.”<sup>111</sup> Yet when read to the letter, Freud does not transgress or diverge from modern metaphysical assumptions about the (logical) identity of the subject as much as is commonly thought. In what arguably remains an unappreciated critical and deconstructive reading of Freud, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen shows in *The Freudian Subject* that the Freud of the first topography conceives of the unconscious as a subject in terms that are still effectively Cartesian. This period’s major theoretical texts and case studies, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* to “On Narcissism: An Introduction” and the other metapsychological writings, presume that repressed, unconscious thoughts are indeed thoughts in the modern sense of representations and that they are thus present to a unitary thinking agency or subject, i.e., a subjectum as Heidegger understood the term: an anthropological principle presumed to underlie thought.<sup>112</sup> So even while Freud claims in the late 1910’s and early 1920s that identification is not only the first kind of relation the subject has with the other but the prior basis and primary condition of its identity, his model of the psychological apparatus is not accordingly revised to account for this transitivity between “subjects,” and plurality therefore remains secondary to them. The subject qua conscious and self-conscious identity, that is, may be subverted by the unconscious, but a unitary representational agency and thus subject nonetheless turns up there. The Freud of the second topography (of id, ego, and superego) may, as Jean-Luc Nancy stresses, pluralize the subject to a greater extent than had heretofore happened, but unconscious thought continues to retain its representational and thus subjective character and the ego, while newly located between consciousness and the unconscious, remains unitary. Some of the statements of Freud’s that were so important to deconstruction—“identification is the earliest form of emotional tie,” “psyche is outside herself”—are for that reason not only marginal (in the deconstructive sense) to his work but far from endorsements or incipient versions of the understanding of self and consciousness I argue emerges in Jane Roberts’ writing and life.*

*The difference between the unconscious and “other-consciousness” in fact starkly emerges at the very outset of Jane’s life as a mystic and visionary writer. The present chapter, which provides an account (through retelling and thus interpreting her autobiography) of the beginning of her mystical path and life as a channel, shows that Jane’s conflicted relation to “psychology”—by which she primarily meant psychiatry and psychoanalysis—was at the heart of her very first questions about the status of “Seth” and thus the character of psychological identity in general. Her anxiety that “Seth” may be nothing but a manifestation of her unconscious has its roots in the cultural predominance of psychoanalysis in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and specifically in the fact that psychoanalysis’ theoretical reinscription of the Cartesian subject was carried out a second time over in the negative influence this had on the importance psychology once granted mediumship and multiple personality. Unlike many of his contemporaries and interlocutors, that is, Freud did not see either kind of psychological plurality as bearing essentially on the nature of identity since the manifestations of unconscious thought operant in them were already evident in the far more common phenomena of dreams and conversion symptoms. This is to say that where Flournoy and the early Jung, for instance, needed to scrutinize spirit mediums in order to understand how perception and thought could be operant well outside the horizon of consciousness, Freud could look to “ordinary” neurosis alone. Once psychoanalysis emerged as the dominant*

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<sup>111</sup> Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1973), 206.

<sup>112</sup> See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 1-9.

*philosophical psychology, the peculiar plurality at work in mediumship thus ceased to be regarded as holding implications for any basic understanding of identity. Most crucial for our purposes is that William James' characterization of multiple personality and spirit mediumship as "mutations of the self" therefore became unremarkable once plurality was understood (within the limits outlined above) as already being the basic organization of the psyche (i.e., the Cs-Pcs-Uncs system), and the same fate befell his understanding of religious conversion: the theory from The Varieties of Religious Experience—that conversion is a transformation of the self resulting from the shifting of certain thoughts to the center of consciousness and the displacement of others to its periphery—lost its force when consciousness ceased to be the scene of psychic activity. Half a century later, the consequences for Jane were that the probability was slim that she could have immediately understood "Seth" as such a "mutation of self" and/or as an effect of a transformation or "conversion" peculiar to religious experience, which is why she is forced to seek and eventually attempt to invent an alternative, non- or anti-psychoanalytic intellectual and scientific framework in which "he" could be intelligible as anything but a symptom of the unconscious. (Realizing that "another consciousness" was already at work in her remained entirely out of the question.)*

*The main aim of this chapter is to sketch out this problem by following Roberts' own attempt to identify and contend with it. Had the problematic outlined above been more clear to me at the time of writing it, the chapter could have been constructed in a more explicitly philosophical mode and an argument made concerning how James' psychology of religion—particular his concept of conversion—could be used to reinterpret certain basic psychoanalytic postulates of contemporary theory, philosophy, and anthropology. In its present form, however, the chapter accomplishes a few things that are part of the overall project of this dissertation. First, it identifies, largely by patiently following Roberts' writing, the historical constellation of science, quasi-science, literature, and psychological experience in which she is embedded. This includes how psychical research might have rendered Roberts more intelligible to herself had it flourished to the extent that its proponents thought it would; the fact that scientific experimentation and testing may be indissociable from any attempt to understand the truth of oneself in modernity (hence her attempt to test "Seth"); and some of the links between her case and psychoanalysis more broadly. Second, this chapter shows her deep affinity with the poet Fernando Pessoa, whose understanding of the multiplicity of identity has been important to French philosophy but not in a way that has allowed the specificity to emerge of his plural psychic organization and occult roots or the reading of such plurality as the "substance" of the subject. The fact Pessoa—who has been granted a place in the pantheon of properly philosophical poets by philosophy—can himself be reread in light of Roberts shows how the reading I undertake of her here immediately bears on philosophical issues. Third, most importantly, this chapter engages in the very difficult work of tracking Roberts' thinking at this stage of her writing. Given that her questioning and "Seth's" work have not yet taken the precise form they later will, finding "thought" where none would seem to be is itself a difficult undertaking (especially since anthropology still tends to reduce thinking to expressions of common sense, popular discourse, and now expert knowledge—and the latter may be very different from conceptual thought and knowledge).*

*What remains inchoate in this chapter is thus largely a result of this labor of deep engagement with Roberts' work, the sort of "fieldwork" that, as George Marcus has recently put it, often results in a piece of writing and thinking that is necessarily incomplete because it hews so closely to its "object" of research. As Marcus puts it:*

*Based on my experience of supervising dissertations, I think they should be governed by a theorem of reasonable and responsible incompleteness, in which fieldwork self-consciously accomplishes something unfinished. The traditional 'holistic' norms embedded in expectations of fieldwork can just pressure and overwhelm, long after anthropologists have given up the naïve, functionalist sense of the whole as totality. Also, I think the dissertation ideally should not be the first draft of a book, as it often is these days, but the opportune moment in which the research is completely accountable*



for the material that the anthropologist has been able to produce, messy as it may be. *Theoretical, analytical originality, yes, but only in a close relation to 'data.'*<sup>113</sup>

*This sort of close "anthropological" engagement was of course not undertaken here for its own sake but in order to begin to understand a strange mode of thought. Whatever the limits of the form of this chapter, it brings out the problems, questions, methods, conditions and incipient concepts of Jane's thinking.*

"MY SKULL WAS A RECEIVING STATION, TURNED UP TO UNBEARABLE VOLUME"

In 1963, when she was in her mid-thirties, Jane Roberts, author of a science fiction novel, *The Rebels*, and a handful of short stories in the same genre, unexpectedly and spontaneously entered an ecstatic state while she was seated alone at her work table, writing poetry. "Suddenly my consciousness left my body," she writes in the introduction to *Seth Speaks*, the first of the eleven books she would dictate for and as Seth, "and my mind was barraged by ideas that were astonishing and new to me at the time. On return to my body, I discovered that my hands had produced an automatic script, explaining many of the concepts I'd been given. The notes were even titled—*The Physical Universe as Idea Construction*."<sup>114</sup>

The story, as she explained five years later, was that

[i]t was a lovely autumn evening. After supper I sat down at my old table in the living room, as I always did, to work on my poetry. Rob was painting in the studio, three rooms away. I took out my pen and paper and settled down with my ninth or tenth cup of coffee for the day, and my cigarettes. Willie, our cat, dozed on the rug.

What happened next was like a 'trip' without drugs. If someone had slipped me an LSD cube on the sly, the experience couldn't have been more bizarre. Between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into my head with tremendous force, as if my skull were some sort of receiving station, turned up to unbearable volume. Not only ideas came through this channel, but sensations, intensified and pulsating. I was tuned in, turned on – whatever you want to call it – connected to some incredible source of energy. I didn't even have time to call out to Rob.

It was as if the physical world were really tissue-paper thin, hiding infinite dimensions of reality, and I was suddenly flung through the tissue paper with a huge ripping sound. My body sat at the table, my hands furiously scribbling down the words and ideas that flashed through my head. Yet I seemed to be somewhere else, at the same time, traveling through things. I went plummeting through a leaf, to find a whole new universe open up; and then out again, drawn into new perspectives.

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<sup>113</sup> Paul Rabinow and George E. Marcus, *Designs for An Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 82. My emphasis.

<sup>114</sup> Jane Roberts, *Seth Speaks: The Eternal Validity of The Soul* (San Rafael: Amber Allen Publishing, 1994), vi. Hereafter cited as *SS*.

I felt as if knowledge was being implanted in the very cells my body so that I couldn't forget it – a gut knowing, a biological spirituality. It was feeling and knowing, rather than intellectual knowledge. At the same time I remembered having a dream the night before, which I had forgotten, in which the same sort of experience had occurred. And I knew the two were connected.

When I came to, I found myself scrawling what was obviously meant as the title of that odd batch of notes: *The Physical Universe as Idea Construction*.<sup>115</sup>

“As it was,” Roberts says of this unexpected illumination, “I didn’t know what had happened, yet even then I felt that my life had suddenly changed.” Although she had, having been born in 1929 in upstate New York, been raised Catholic by her mother and the nuns that instructed her in elementary school, she had long since jettisoned an active relation to its practices and tenets in favor of a life unencumbered by the conventions and conformity so pervasive in the America of the 1950s. Rebellious and defiant as a young woman, she lived freely while a college student, leading a campus creative writing group and dating at one point a professor, and had turned, not as some of her contemporaries had begun to, to the “philosophies” of “the East,” but to the writing of literature, specifically the burgeoning genre of science fiction, which had already become the discursive home for intellects whose lack of formal refinement and educated restraint seem to prime them to receive and re-transmit with laser precision the very sort of pure informational download for which Roberts had herself just become a biological satellite dish. Without the bits and shards, then, of the foreign conceptual frameworks by which others of her generation named and understood illumination—*bodhi*, *satori*, *moksha*—she could for the moment only struggle feebly to categorize what had just transpired. “The word revelation came to mind and I tried to dismiss it, yet the word was apt. I was afraid of the term with its mystical implications. I was familiar with inspiration in my own work, but this was different.”<sup>116</sup>

The ideas I had received were just as startling. They turned all my ideas of reality upside down. That morning and each morning until that time, I’d been sure of one thing: you could trust physical reality. You might not like it at times, but you could depend on it. You could change your ideas toward it, if you chose, but this would in no way change what reality was. Now I could never feel that way again.

During that experience I knew we formed physical matter, not the other way around; that our senses showed us only one three-dimensional reality out of an infinite number that we couldn’t ordinarily perceive; that we could trust our senses only so far as we did not ask questions that were beyond their limited scope of knowledge.

But more: I just didn’t know, for example, that everything had its own consciousness. Now I suddenly felt the fantastic vitality present even in things I’d previously considered inanimate. A nail was sticking in the windowsill, and I

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<sup>115</sup> Jane Roberts, *The Seth Material* (Manhasset, New York: New Awareness Network, 2010), 10. Hereafter cited as *SM*.

<sup>116</sup> *SM*, 11.

experienced ever so briefly the consciousness of the atoms and molecules that composed it.

Despite all my previous ideas and common sense, I knew that time wasn't a series of moments one before the other, each one like a clothespin stuck on a line, but that all experience existed in some kind of eternal now. All of this was scribbled down so fast [...].<sup>117</sup>

... and in the manner of the automatic writing that had been engaged in by spiritualist mediums and even hysterics (at the behest of psychiatrists bent on determining the nature and extent of their paralyses and blindness) throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, during which even the avant-garde—not just Breton and the Surrealists but Fernando Pessoa and then James Merrill<sup>118</sup>—sought by its means access to the power of the creative force that seemed to lie on the hither side of the *Cogito* that the disciplinary forces of European *Bildung* had, in a puncturing jab, crammed into them out of the psychic viscera that it had torn out of them and rearranged. A feverish scribbling occurred that was in no way present to her quite absent consciousness, and it recorded and in part constituted the contents of perfectly lucid mental activity that happened in the void it left open. “We are,” *Idea Construction* reads

[I]ndividualized portions of energy, materialized within physical existence, to learn to form ideas from energy, and make them physical (this is idea construction). We project ideas into an object, so that we can deal with it. But the object is the thought, materialized. The physical representation of idea permits us to learn the difference between the ‘I’ who thinks and the thought. Idea construction teaches the ‘I’ what it is, by showing its own products in a physical manner. We learn by viewing our own creations, in other words. We learn the power and effects of ideas by changing them into physical realities; and we learn responsibility in the use of creative energy [...]

The entity is the basic self, immortal, nonphysical. It communicates on an energy level with other entities, and has an almost inexhaustible supply of energy at its command. The individual is the portion of the whole self that we manage to express physically [...]

The eye projects and focuses the inner image (idea) onto the physical world in the same manner that a motion picture camera transfers an image onto a screen. The mouth creates words. The ears create sound. The difficulty in understanding the principle is due to the fact that we’ve taken it for granted that the image and sound already exist for the senses to interpret. Actually the senses are the channels of creation by which idea is projected onto material expression.

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<sup>117</sup> *SM*, 11.

<sup>118</sup> See James Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover* (New York: Knopf, 1982). This major canonical work of 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry was partly composed by Merrill and his partner, David Noyes Jackson, using a Ouija board. The various “spirits” that speak throughout the work are thus indicated in the text in the same way that the *dramatis personae* of a play are.

The basic idea is that the senses are developed, not to permit awareness of an already existing material world, but to create it [. . .]

[. . .] The subconscious is the threshold of idea's emergence into the individual's conscious mind. It connects the entity and the individual . . . The physical body is the material construction of the entity's idea of itself under the properties of matter . . . Instinct is the minimum ability for idea construction necessary for physical survival . . . The present is the apparent point of any idea's emergence into physical matter.<sup>119</sup>

The scrawl of freehand notes on what might sound (to those who believe themselves to be the truly learned) like a cannabis-muddled mind's cocktail rendition of second-hand accounts of Bishop Berkeley and Fichte or the Vedas continues for a hundred pages, the discursive leftovers of an experience much like what one might imagine to be the mystical breakthrough that Hegel experienced, and that left him (as Bataille emphasizes), shattered, unsure of his sanity, and doubtful that his own existence was of any significance in the face and light of the massive, infinite unfolding of the absolute. Yet Roberts, unless she forgetfully repressed or downplayed in her accounts of the experience the trauma that ought, it seems, to result from having "*a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas*" rush into the brain so that it felt like "*some sort of receiving station, turned up to an unbearable volume,*" with "*intensified and pulsating*" sensations rushing, at the same time, through it at high speed, unless she forced down the fear, and more, the inevitable feeling of brokenness and fragmentation that might have resulted, it would seem that she was, again like so many of her generation and the one that followed, simply ready and thirsty for more—more depersonalization and ecstasy, more experiences of being stretched across, through, and with being itself: she immediately set out to probe into the experience and the very being of the reality that it seemed to expose. Yet like too few of her contemporaries—most of those that followed a similar course either exhausted their fire by becoming addicted to being temporarily dispersed into being, or returned from it after a few years of play, to a well ordered and distributed world—she wedged herself as best she could into the corner at which ecstasy's plane intersected that of reason, and then begin a perilous climb up the thin vertical line formed by their crossing.

#### "ALL THINGS ARE FRAGMENTS"

The incongruity between this ecstatic experience and her everyday life was a provocation to her curiosity and intellect, as was the fact that in the weeks following the experience, she began recalling her dreams ("it was like a discovering a second life"<sup>120</sup>). Two of these, she claimed, seemed to be precognitive, and she thus began reading about mediums and extrasensory perception. And then, unmoved by any of the three outlines for prospective novels she was working on, Jane took up her husband's suggestion to write a nonfiction book on extrasensory perception, and the possibility that it was, as suggested by her new experiences, a capacity belonging to most people. Since Roberts was an innate skeptic and far from a believer in the occult, she devised a series of experiments aimed to test Butts' hypothesis, and she proposed, to the publisher of her first novel, to conduct these

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<sup>119</sup> SM, 11-12.

<sup>120</sup> SM, 13.

herself and then report on the results in the book she wanted them to publish. Within two weeks, she received an affirmative response from her agent, who wanted her to begin immediately work on the book, whose chapter titles, aimed toward a mass market audience—"A Do-It Yourself Séance," "Telepathy: Fact or Fiction?," "How to Work with the Ouija"—now appeared absurd to her.<sup>121</sup>

Yet economic need trumped any lingering attachments Jane might have had to maintaining a sense of her own dignity, and work began on the tests and experiments the book was to report on, and through which she hoped to make intelligible the incongruity of the experience that had occurred only weeks before. She thus attempted to submit herself to scientific discourse – to put herself "in the true," as everyone must, as Foucault says, in order to make their experience count for something, to register it as valuable; but she also, as will become evident, managed to generate through her appropriation of the experimental machinery of science and the work of reason, another kind of truth, one that fell outside the sphere of any particular scientific discourse but that nonetheless earned itself some claim on truth.

First came the Ouija board. In late November, Roberts and Butts playfully but somewhat ashamedly began experimenting with one found in the attic of their apartment building, and after a couple of unsuccessful attempts at allowing its pointer to drag their fingers over the alphabet emblazoned upon the board in turn of the century typography, the desired movement commenced, the ghostly force that appeared to guide it terminating over a series of letters that indicated both a biography and a name. Haltingly, with all the slow deliberateness that a spirit attempting to work such a telegraph would be thought by the credulous to evince, "Frank Withers" said that he had been born in 1882, had lived in Elmira with his wife, a woman of Italian extraction named Ursula Altieri, and had died there some twenty years before, in 1942. The sparse character of this supposed Withers' communications did not change in the conversations with him that took place in the ensuing days, during which he asserted that he had known his now distant interlocutors during an incarnation in the Denmark of the thirteenth century, and Roberts and Butts in turn discovered that a man of his name had indeed lived in Elmira and died there during the 1940s. Yet it was not this last piece of information that spurned the two to flirt further with the dead, but what came through in their next attempt to exchange dot-dash with Withers, for it was then, amidst the calm of a light and steady December snowfall, that the entire atmosphere of their living room, as Roberts was to later say, radically changed, as the pointer and their accompanying hands took off frantically and at high speed, accommodating the drastically improved lexicon and finally complete, soon to be elaborate, sentences of a personality that no longer wanted to call itself Withers. The reply that Robert Butts received when he began the session by asking Withers if he had a message for his callers was, "Consciousness is like a flower with many petals," which Butts followed with a query about what Withers thought of the other incarnations of which had already spoken; to which Withers' said, "They are what I am, but I will be more. Pun: The whole is the sum of its hearts."<sup>122</sup> And, then, with the Ouija's pointer racing, according to Roberts, across the board, Roberts Butts' asked their phantom conversation partner, "Frank Withers, can we refer back to you on any specific question in the future?," and received this answer:

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<sup>121</sup> *SM*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> *SM*, 16.

‘YES. I PREFER NOT TO BE CALLED FRANK WITHERS. THAT PERSONALITY WAS RATHER COLORLESS’

And then, according to Roberts’ reckoning,

Rob and I shrugged at each other: this was really wild, and the pointer was speeding faster and faster. Rob waited a moment, and then asked, ‘What would you prefer to be called?’

TO GOD, ALL NAMES ARE HIS NAME, the pointer spelled.

Now, Withers was getting religious! I rolled my eyes and pretended to stare out the window.

‘But we still need some kind of name to use in talking to you,’ Rob said.

YOU MAY CALL ME WHATEVER YOU CHOOSE. I CALL MYSELF SETH. IT FITS THE ME OF ME, THE PERSONALITY MORE CLEARLY APPROXIMATING THE WHOLE SELF I AM, OR AM TRYING TO BE . . . YOUR WHOLE SELF, MORE OR LESS, THE IMAGE OF THE SUM OF YOUR VARIOUS PERSONALITIES IN THE PAST AND FUTURE.<sup>123</sup>

Their play at experimentation, it seemed to Robert Butts, was yielding results that could be built upon. Perhaps, he suggested to Jane after the session was over, their interlocutor had survived death. She was disgusted at the prospect—spirits, if they exist, would have better things to do than to chat with the living by means of Ouija boards, and at any rate, despite his protests to the contrary, Withers and Seth were probably, she said, merely joint artifacts of their subconscious minds. (Withers-Seth’s reply to Butts asking if he was merely her subconscious talking had been: “SUBCONSCIOUS IS A CORRIDOR. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE WHICH DOOR YOU TRAVEL THROUGH?”<sup>124</sup>) Yet her curiosity—about her own breakthrough and now the Ouija’s messages, and the either factual or artifactual status of both—didn’t flag, and was instead only further stoked by the next sessions with Seth (Withers, whom his replacement was later to refer to with satisfaction as a “fathead,” simply disappeared), in which she began to anticipate the board’s replies, and then, with all the appropriate anxiety, to hear in her head the words about to be spelled upon it, first sentences and then entire paragraphs, and at a rate that only kept accelerating.

This new phenomenon culminated in a session in which Butts asked the board and Seth what exactly a mutual friend of his and Roberts’ had seen years earlier when he encountered an apparition. “A FRAGMENT OF HIS OWN ENTITY,” or soul, according to the then-private parlance of Jane’s *Idea Construction* manuscript, was Seth’s reply. “A PAST PERSONALITY REGAINING MOMENTARY INDEPENDENCE ON VISUAL PLANE. SOMETIMES A LAPSE OF THIS TYPE OCCURS.”<sup>125</sup> And then Butts’ next interrogative—“Was the image conscious of Bill’s presence?”—was the occasion for the experiments’ next yield.

In Jane Robert’s voice:

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<sup>123</sup> SM, 17.

<sup>124</sup> SM, 17.

<sup>125</sup> SM, 21.

I hardly heard Rob ask the question. 'Through the whole session I'd been hearing the words in my head before they were spelled, and I'd felt the impulse to speak them. Now the impulse grew terribly stronger and I grew more determined to fight it. Yet I was terribly curious. And what could happen, after all? I didn't know – and this made me even more curious.

The pointer began to spell out the answer to Rob's question.

IN SOME SUBMERGED MANNER, ALL FRAGMENTS OF A PERSONALITY  
EXIST WITHIN AN ENTITY, AND WITH THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS . . .

The pointer paused. I felt as if I was standing, shivering, on the top of a high diving board, trying to make myself jump while all kinds of people were waiting impatiently behind me. Actually it was the words that pushed at me—they seemed to rush through my mind. In some crazy fashion I felt as if they'd back up, piles of nouns and verbs in my head until they closed everything else off if I didn't speak them. And without really knowing how or why, I opened up my mouth and let them out. For the first time, I began to speak for Seth, continuing the sentences the board has spelled out only a moment before.

'When Bill saw the image and recognized its presence, the fragment itself seemed to have a dream. The entity operates its fragments in what you would call a subconscious manner, that is, without conscious direction. The entity gives the fragment independent life, then the entity more or less forgets the fragment. When a momentary lapse of control occurs, they both come face to face. It's as impossible for the entity to control fragment personalities as for the conscious mind to control the body's heartbeat.'

Suddenly the words stopped. I stared at Rob.

'Could you hear yourself?' he asked.

I nodded, bewildered. 'Dimly, as if a radio program was going on in my head from some other station.' I paused and put my hands back on the pointer, thinking that I'd had enough of this speaking –or whatever it was – for one night.<sup>126</sup>

However, she wasn't yet finished, for although she relaxed and began again to let the Ouija's pointer move, seemingly allowing herself to aid it in answering Butts' follow-up—is it possible to meet a fragment of oneself in everyday life?—her thoughts took off at a vertiginous speed once more, anticipating the coming words—"OF COURSE. I WILL TRY TO MAKE A GOOD ANALOGY TO MAKE THE POINT CLEARER. EVEN THOUGHTS, FOR INSTANCE, ARE FRAGMENTS, THOUGH ON A DIFFERENT PLANE . . ."—which were being delivered with what was for Jane such an intolerable slowness that she felt a "terrific impatience" just before they began erupting from her again, to complete the thought: " . .

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<sup>126</sup> *SM*, 19-20.

they have to be translated into physical reality. Fragments of another sort, personality fragments, operate independently, although under the auspices of the entity.”<sup>127</sup>

Shocked once more, and now quite cautious, they terminated the session after a few more questions and answers, which were delivered again by means of the board alone. But still driven, no doubt, by a growing fascination with the alterity of the thoughts that had begun violently coursing through Robert’s mind and then articulating themselves through a vocal apparatus which was beginning to no longer seem simply her own, she and Robert Butts continued to initiate sessions. In those that immediately followed, which began in each case with Jane perceiving in her mind, while attempting to use the Ouija’s pointer, a proliferating pile-up of words that soon broke or cajoled open whatever barrier was holding them back so that they “tumbled out” through her voice, “Seth” continued to emerge, his personality increasingly crystallizing itself by means of the distinctive lexicon, rhetorical style, and gestures that were manifested with increasing complexity. Eyes wide open, her pupils dilated, she paced up and down their living room while delivering spontaneously, without hesitation or correction, a discourse to which Butts listened while taking shorthand notes, and that he said seemed as if it was being read from an invisible manuscript.

The first of this series of sessions began with Butts asking Seth if trees and plants were also, as the latter had said of selves and thoughts, fragments of some other being, an inquiry which solicited an elaborate discussion of the fragment—of how all things are, in a sense, fragments, but not of the same kind: there are fragments, come to life, of the individual personality, such as the phantom encountered by the couple’s friend Bill, which are “split personality fragments,” projections of the psyche unconsciously created in order either to retrieve knowledge from distant times and places, or to release from it the volatile pressure of repressed aggression with which the ego has failed to identify; but the ego is also itself, as he had indicated days before, a fragment, this time of its own soul or entity, all of whose properties belong to it, whether potentially or actually.<sup>128</sup>

Prognostication followed, in which it was stated that human consciousness will expand and its aperture widen, so that the personality fragment that is the self, all its own projected fragments, and the entirety of the other fragmented incarnations of its soul can be held in focus without strain. “It is toward this,” continued this fragment or personality of uncertain status, “that evolution is headed, though, of course, at its usual donkey-slow rate.”<sup>129</sup>

Seth spoke that night for three hours, until midnight, with Jane hardly aware of what was happening until afterwards, when she looked over the notes Butts’ had taken. The other main subject of this other persona’s tireless discourse was of a diagnostic nature. Years earlier, the couple had encountered, while on a vacation in Maine, an elderly couple in a nightclub who, apart from their age, seemed their spitting image, and who accordingly trapped Jane’s gaze and disturbed her, for these other two were aloof and obviously bitter, even worn by what appeared to be some buried resentment. Seth declared the couple to have been living fragments of both Jane and Rob, doubles, doppelgangers congealed into matter from the psychic force of their own rejected and disavowed destructive energies. Had they unconsciously accepted the pair as themselves, he continued, then they would have psychologically transformed into them, becoming and deteriorating into their own worst

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<sup>127</sup> *SM*, 20.

<sup>128</sup> *SM*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> *SM*, 25.



selves; but they had instead responded with behavior that they both had found inexplicable, but which Seth pronounced to have been highly therapeutic—Rob immediately insisted, after taking stock of these others and letting out a groan about them, that they head to the dance floor, where they danced aggressively for hours. The incident had marked a permanent sea change, Roberts said, in Butts' psychological outlook, which from that point on had been much more optimistic, and which was accompanied by a pronounced improvement in back pain that had bothered him for a few years; both things, Seth said, resulted from their encounter with and reaction to these psychic doubles.

In the late hour of the session's completion, she immediately questioned Seth's account of that night in Maine, which seemed to her, based on what she understood of psychoanalytic conceptions of projection and transference, symbolically and psychologically valid, but physically impossible. Doubt, however, was becoming for Jane a constitutive aspect of a process from which she might stand to gain, she wagered, a great deal of knowledge, and whose termination would deprive her not only of this possibility, but of the consummation of a will to knowledge in which the very skepticism that might have put the breaks on the game was merely the flipside of a ravenous curiosity of equal strength. And so the next session, in which Seth held forth about the fragment personalities that he said both she and Butts had created in childhood, and then another, in which the couple's friend again participated and during which Seth demonstrated the instability of sense phenomena by ostensibly causing his image to appear in the place of Jane's while the three gazed into a mirror. And again, one more, which the couple had at first thought (because this hallucination has so disturbed them) would be the last, during which Jane-as-Seth paced about the room, waving her hands and carrying on jovially and fluently "like a professor in a small seminar,"<sup>130</sup> lecturing to Butts about the illusory objectivity of sense reality and its intersection with myriad invisible planes of existence, such as Seth's. Then another session, in which Jane's "Seth" voice transmogrifies, while discoursing on time, into one that might have belonged to an elderly, quite masculine gentleman—low and booming, unlike her own, yet refined by its precise enunciation and easy conformity to grammatical rule. Less than two months had passed since she and Butts had begun playing with the Ouija, and now Seth seemed to be solidifying himself into a distinct and phenomenally available person, and as some kind of answer to the barely articulable questions provoked by the evening that occurred a few weeks before the initial experiment—when Jane somehow punctured and broke through what had once looked like a sheer limit.

#### PRESSING QUESTIONS: MADNESS

All the words and sensations that continued in the next months and years to course through the caesura opened by this initial passage continued to emphasize everything that the deluge preceding them did: that the senses passively receive only what they and the mind first fabricate from scratch; that a present event does not succeed its predecessors, which have ceased to exist except in memory, but that all occurrences somehow co-exist in a more vast now without before or after and in which they are juxtaposed and scattered, like an endless expanse of agricultural fields seen from above; and that the psyche somehow fragments and implants itself into myriad squares on time's grid, forming in the soil of each a self that belongs to the multiplicity of its incarnations. And it is through and in relation to

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<sup>130</sup> *SM*, 38.

this last idea that so many of Jane's own questions were raised and incessantly and often difficulty thought—questions about who or what Seth was, and about who or what she or any other person might be when cast in the strange light they were together emitting. For the increasingly voluminous mass of what this seeming person that called himself Seth said of the soul was beginning to render intelligible something of the reality that her breakthrough had exposed, so that she could begin to answer, as she did at the time, the second question: who or what are we, as individual beings that say 'I'? And yet on the other hand, the very voice that was providing the material for a response was that of either a real or a false phantom, with serious consequences in each case. The first option, if true, would only intensify the necessity of addressing the question of who and what a person is when she says and thinks 'I,' while the second, if a correct characterization of Seth, would obviously undermine the reliability of an answer from him. Making a decision about Seth's validity was thus necessary, if Jane was to move closer in her approach to the question—who or what, again, am 'I'?—that insistently posed itself in the wake of the disruption these months introduced permanently into her life.

All that is how her own reasoning went, and the order of priority she assigned to the two questions. While both she and Robert Butts were intrigued by the concepts that had begun to take shape in Seth's lessons and all those from *Idea Construction* that it seemed to build upon, the books they were now devouring on mediums and extrasensory perception all advised that anyone undergoing the experiences she now was contact a psychologist or a Spiritualist group in order to certify the reality of whatever psychic phenomena might be occurring and to disconfirm the possibility of madness. The Spiritualists, Roberts recounts, were out of the question for her, since she was averse to anything that she understood to be "religious." "Besides," she was to later say, "there was the pressing question," which already had been raised repeatedly from the moment of Withers' appearance to Seth's most recent lecture: "Was Seth a part of my subconscious?"<sup>131</sup> It was a question to which was affixed, of course, another one, about her sanity. After all, Seth, unquestionably a person that had not previously existed apart from her (and in all likelihood, it was obvious to her, could not have continued to), was already the author of hundreds of pages of a discourse about a psyche whose incarnations were always multiple, and which were described as fragment personalities, a situation that could only beg the question of whether Seth was merely indeed an instance of a second personality, a double of her own ego, just like those of the multiple personalities, that she was beginning to learn had always hovered in close proximity to mediums like herself.

Robert Butts thus sent a letter describing the events of the past months and asked for advice about how to determine Seth's authenticity to a psychologist at the University of Virginia by the name of Ian Stevenson, whose research on reincarnation he had just read.<sup>132</sup> And so the experimental sprint that he was accompanying his wife on suddenly veered into a territory with which they were both completely unfamiliar, and upon which were scattered a series of obstacles—tests, sometimes administered with hostility—that threatened to put their movement to a halt. They had both unwittingly stepped into an abandoned scientific field that had once existed at the juncture of psychiatry and experimental psychology, in which fascination with mediums and psychic (meaning, in this case, telepathic) phenomena almost deprived those who worked in it of legitimacy many decades before, just prior to its

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<sup>131</sup> *SM*, 50.

<sup>132</sup> See Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1980).

being devalued and then emptied of them by the speculative land boom sparked in and upon a psychology and medical technique that would have, for most of the next century, both the first and last word about whatever others might speak in the subject's stead and from beyond it; namely, psychoanalysis...

FLASHBACK—PARIS 1870-1890, BOSTON 1890-1894, VIENNA 1914

It is well known that the psychology and psychiatry that were displaced by Freud's also developed (like his) by scrutinizing pathologies and phenomena that appeared to offer evidence of the existence of a sphere of cognition existing apart from and underneath consciousness. It was not only the demand to be heard made by this other cogito through hysteria that lured psychological knowledge into its first formulations about a supposed *subconscious*(ness), but the means, too, by which it was at first thought to be treatable, and which were soon considered to be somehow (either partially or absolutely) its cause and origin—hypnosis and suggestibility—that provoked the speculation that would result in Freud conceptualizing the unconscious. What also sprouted up and was nourished within hysteria and in hypnosis' vicinity was a pathology that mutated quickly and was rechristened each time it did so: what was first called spontaneous somnambulism and then *dédoublement de personnalité* before being dubbed multiple personality, and then multiple personality disorder, was a pathology characterized not only by the psychic paralysis, blindness, and somatic symptoms proper to hysteria but also by both the periodic absence of the self, which all at once disappeared as the volition, memories, and persona from which its identity was composed did, and by the concomitant appearance of what was purportedly another personality, complete with its own set of memories, desires, and personal characteristics.<sup>133</sup>

Before passing, as it altogether had by the 1920s, from the various national psychiatric scenes that came to be dominated by psychoanalysis, the doubling, tripling, or multiplication of the personality was a phenomenon whose study yielded experimental psychology factual and speculative gains: the old empiricist claim, first made by Locke, that the self is merely a composite of thoughts and memories repeated over time was amply demonstrated by the fact that certain bodies of memories typically corresponded to and were exclusive to a second personality (and thus unavailable to the dominant self or persona).<sup>134</sup> Although psychological medicine soon specified this claim (by showing that the dissociation of one self and set of memories from another lacked any organic basis and was merely an artifact of hypnotic suggestibility), the latter proved at the same time that both ego and consciousness were unnecessary to the complex acts of cognition and motor action that could be provoked by suggestion. A speculative and philosophical conclusion, moreover, was even made on the basis, in part, of these facts, which was that the self that is so dramatically displaced in cases of doubling, and that one normally believes oneself to be—a basically self-identical being that continuously remains so through time—is always disappearing and being effaced, and is only ever a brief and instantaneous thought, a judgment that appropriates some of the many thoughts that preceded it while rejecting others.

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<sup>133</sup> See Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

The last claim was made by William James in 1890, in *The Principles of Psychology*, a text that in the course of conceptualizing, on the basis of experimental evidence, the mind, cognition, and self-consciousness, turned not only to studies of cases of double and multiple personalities for data, but of possession and mediumship. It was in discussing these latter, sibling “mutations of the self,” which had been rife for five decades in a United States taken by Spiritualism, that James noted two things about the personages that appear in such cases. Not only, first, do they appear to be, to some great degree and just like doubles, artifacts of hypnotic suggestion—their utterances, he says, clearly belong to a genre that the entranced, suggestible person adopts and reproduces because social expectations demands it (the “controls,” as the spirits speaking through mediums in the nineteenth century called themselves, were always either “grotesque, slangy, and flippant personages,” usually American Indians as they were conceived in the racial imagination of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or intellectual proponents of a vague philosophy of progress). But also, second, no matter how much these “spirit” personas usually conform to such generic ideals, instances of them exist that “may be altogether different from any *possible* waking self of the person,” since they are acquainted with facts about living and dead persons with whom the mediums they speak through are completely unacquainted and ignorant.<sup>135</sup> The latter quite candid admission, which James even calls a “confession,” was followed by a declaration that “a serious study of such truly anomalous trance phenomena is one of the greatest needs of psychology.”<sup>136</sup>

It became, of course, well known soon after that he himself was engaged in such work, not only as a fellow traveler and interlocutor of those scientists the recently born Society For Psychical Research comprised (a group James presided over for a brief time), but through the investigation he was to undertake of the case of a particularly adept medium named Leonora Piper, the very case on which the judgment he proffered in *The Principles of Psychology* was based. His familiarity with her work was gained both through research he conducted with her and via the frequent visitations his family paid her, as clients of her services (or “sitters”). Both things convinced him not of the reality of immediate, telepathic communication in rare instances, a small handful of which were amenable, he argued, to verification. The real question, then, was never for James a matter of whether the group of spirit controls Mrs. Piper consistently manifested in séances were the personalities of dead people that had taken possession of her body, but of telepathy’s extent, its nature, and the claims it might make on psychology and physics. About Piper’s controls, James said, against another researcher’s testament to their reality, and especially about one that called itself “Rector”:

I have rather favored the idea of their all being dream-creations of Mrs. Piper, probably having no existence except when she is in trance, but consolidated by repetition into personalities consistent enough to play their several roles. Such at least is the dramatic impression left on them by my mind. I can see no contradiction between Rector’s being on the one hand an improvised creature of this sort, and his being on the other hand the extraordinarily impressive personality which he unquestionably is. He has a marvelous discernment of the inner states of the sitters whom he addresses, and speaks straight to their troubles as if he knew them all in

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<sup>135</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 394-396. Hereafter cited as *PPS*.

<sup>136</sup> *PPS*, 396.

advance. He addresses you as if he were the most devote of all your friends. He appears like an aged, and when he speaks instead of writing, like a somewhat hollow-voiced clergyman, a little weary of his experience in the world, endlessly patient and sympathetic, and desiring to put all his tenderness and wisdom at your service while you are there. Critical and fastidious sitters have recognized his wisdom, and confess their debt to him as a moral adviser. With all due respect to Mrs. Piper, I feel very sure that her own waking capacity for being a spiritual adviser, if it were compared with Rector's, would greatly fall behind.

As I conceive the matter, it is on this mass of secondary and automatic personality of which of late years Rector has been the centre, and which forms the steady background of Mrs. Piper's trances, that the supernormal which she unquestionably displays is flashed. Flashed, grafted, inserted – use whatever word you will – the trance-automatism is at any rate the intermediating condition, the supernormal knowledge comes as if from beyond, and the automatism uses its own forms in delivering it to the sitter.<sup>137</sup>

The likely fact that Piper's controls' are artifacts and fictions is by no means, James is saying, an impediment to understanding her supposed telepathic capacities, and even helps explain them. Then why discuss Rector's exemplary personality? Perhaps because James' inquiry into telepathy depended on answers he had arrived at to a prior question, about what kind of personas Piper's or any other medium's control were: person(a)s of quality, as the advisors they in fact were ought to be, or vague, undeveloped person(a)s, of low moral and intellectual character, as the doubles of hysterics tended to be? Judgments about Rector had already been made by James, and they were doubtless necessary if a medium's trance was to be deemed pathological or potentially psychic. It was a question of differentiating the real from the genuine, which is to say of truth (in a sense that will be developed further on).

The possibility of answering it was readily probable for a philosopher and psychologist of James' nearly unequalled stature, as it soon would not be. When Freud visited the United States in 1909 to give the talks at Clark University that famously introduced psychoanalysis to the country, he brought with him a science that not only was to frown on the telepathy that seemed to occur in the course of transference, but that had already vehemently rejected both the hypnotic therapies from which it was itself first built and derived, and the second, third, nth personalities that had proliferated about them. Transference succeeded where hypnosis had failed, went Freud's claim (the intersubjective drama of the transferential relation was supposed to have preserved the freedom and independence of the subject against the domination involved in the hypnotic cure<sup>138</sup>), and the doubles so central to the dramas of Freud's earliest cases, in *Studies on Hysteria*, were discarded in favor of an unconscious that was animated chiefly by one, and only one, desire. Even if something like the old *conditiones secundae* and multiple personalities of the previous decades sometimes played supporting roles in Freud's case studies (at the close of the account of the Rat Man's analysis, he says that it is almost as if his patient's neurosis caused

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<sup>137</sup> William James, "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control," in *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research, Vol. III* (New York: The American Society for Psychical Research), 471-472.

<sup>138</sup> See on this point Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, Affect* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 39-61.

him to alternate between three personalities<sup>139</sup>), there was no ambiguity about the direction in which psychoanalysis quickly headed, in both theory and practice: away from the psychic Hydras of the late nineteenth century, and toward an unconscious that, because it was the perfect, inverted double of the subject, could soon be granted quasi-personological status in being virtually identified with the id, and then later conceived by Lacan as the real subject, the cogito that waking consciousness obscures and obstructs. A practical consequence, throughout both Europe and the United States, was the rapid disappearance of cases of multiple personality disorder, which (even if was paid its best tribute by Morton Prince in 1908), was all but gone by the 1920's. With it went both the probability that a good personality could and would need to be sorted out from the bad, and problems, such as James', that would motivate separating the wheat from the chaff in the first place.

#### FROM MADNESS TO TRUTH...

Writing Ian Stevenson thus really amounted to visiting a city in search of a bygone moment of cultural effervescence. Yet Roberts, at risk of becoming unintelligible to herself, had to pay the tax Foucault says is levied upon the subject that wishes to discern or tell the truth about herself: she submitted, as best she could, to science—to a reasoned discourse, that, whether or not it spoke truly or falsely, belonged squarely within the sphere of life that can separate one from the other, and which is only available to the expert.

Psychology's initial response disappointed and threatened her. Stevenson's written assessment of the transcriptions of Seth's discourse was that their fluency suggested a subconscious origin, and he also warned that unschooled excursions into mediumship sometimes lead to "mental symptoms," by which, perhaps, he meant temporary psychosis.

The couple received the letter in which this was conveyed hours before a session they were to conduct together with Seth, and Roberts was so frightened by the suggestion that she might be decompensating that she was unable to relax into a trance. She left Seth alone for a week, but when she next invited him in, he immediately responded to Stevenson's words of caution and Seth's worries about them. Although the professor's intentions were good, Seth began, he had unnecessarily undermined Jane's confidence with the prospect of insanity, of which he assured them there was not the least danger. "For one thing," he offered Butts as evidence, "I am a sensitive but disciplined and sensible—if not irascible—gentleman. None of the communications from me are conducive to instability. I may make bold to remark that I am more stable than you or Jane or the fine psychologist."<sup>140</sup> He feels a great responsibility for them, he continues, and the advice he had so far offered should only strengthen their psychological balance.

As for his own dependence on Jane entering into dissociative mental states in order to speak, it is a phenomenon to which she consents and which he does not impose upon her. Besides, there is no danger of "dissociation grabbing hold of Jane like some black vague and furry monster, carrying her away to the netherlands of hysteria, schizophrenia, or insanity," for not only will the frequent socializing he had already recommended to her countervail the possibility that she would utilize dissociation as a refuge from the world (to which many, he says, have fallen prey), but her ego is too strong to be weakened by

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<sup>139</sup> See Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," in *Three Case Histories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 81.

<sup>140</sup> *SM*, 53.

frequently giving way to trance states.<sup>141</sup> And, finally, about the question of whether he was somehow a mere product of Jane's unconscious, Seth stated that he would no doubt be addressing this concern for a long time, but that he would attempt to convince them of his reality as an independent being: first, the evident fact that his communications arrive by way of the unconscious does not mean that he is identical with it; and, second, "a certain reassembly of myself is necessary" once he has traveled, like a fish, into and through this medium—a reconstitution that is undertaken by both himself and Jane.<sup>142</sup>

Robert Butts was satisfied by Seth's thorough and cordial explanations, but Jane's doubts were not completely dispelled, and hung in her head like bats. Although she had been assured enough of her sanity to continue to channel Seth, she also knew that she was already so invested in the process that she probably wouldn't accept a diagnosis that said otherwise. She psychoanalyzed and probed both herself and Seth, scrutinizing Seth's communications for signs that he might be manipulating her husband or their life, and her own mental processes for symptoms of delusions...

A year passed, without offering her resolution or satisfaction. Thus another psychologist, and this time a quite reputable one: "Dr. Instream" (the alias she gave him) was, according to Jane, one of the United States' foremost psychologists and experts on hypnosis midcentury, having investigated several mediums and some remaining cases of multiple personality in the previous decades. He responded to the letter the couple sent by inviting them to attend with him the National Hypnosis Symposium, which would take place that year at a location in upstate New York between Elmira and the university at which he taught.

The excursion first proved to be comically painful. Before finding Instream, the couple attend a cocktail hour, where they meet a psychiatrist who becomes interested in Jane's case after they confide to him the true purpose of their visit. In their hotel room, he examines transcripts of Seth's discourse, and quickly declares to Jane that she is "schizoid," and uses the sessions to dominate Butts. He waves the notes from their sessions in her face, demands to know why she believes it is necessary that her husband record them, and when she explains their need for them (and that Rob himself wants to take them), shouts his response (a perfect parody of a stupid mid-century analyst to whom everything could be an instance of negation and resistance): "Aha! That's one of the main symptoms!," and accuses her of being defensive and paranoid.<sup>143</sup>

Was he right? Instream, when they caught up with the psychologist, assured them that he wasn't. While they talk with him at a Howard Johnson's restaurant, Seth makes known to Jane his desire to join the conversation, and so all three and their phantom fourth retire, so as to avoid the scene of a diner booth séance, to Instream's office, where the dialogue begins. In an extended back-and-forth, Instream and Seth (who appall the submerged Jane who looks on by carrying on like two old boys) discuss the prospect of testing the latter's capacities for extrasensory perception. Instream, in turns out, believes in the reality of clairvoyance and telepathy, and wants experimental data sufficient for verifying it. Seth says he will do everything in his power to cooperate with such tests, but cautions that in order to obtain the desired data, they must allow for "spontaneity" by not overly structuring their protocols, while Instream, conveying (or affecting) intimidation, keeps

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<sup>141</sup> *SM*, 53-54.

<sup>142</sup> *SM*, 54-55.

<sup>143</sup> *SM*, 67-68.

repeating that he is “out of his depth” but insists that “a good methodology is important, if we are to get others to listen.”<sup>144</sup> They argue, clarify, join and separate their positions (spontaneity is the most important condition—but it isn’t enough, we need a refined method—a closed mind won’t find its way to the evidence—we need proof); Seth deepens his own, with humor (“The personality must always be considered in an elemental way as patterns of action. When you attempt to tamper with various levels, you change them. When you crack an egg to discover what is inside, you ruin the egg. There are other ways to go about it. We do not need a hammer to crack the eggshell . . . I am an egghead, but do not need a hammer to be cracked”<sup>145</sup>); Instream demands rigor, but also professes his ignorance (“Again, I’m in over my depth. I need time to consider what he can do, what your ideas are”), while all along treating Seth deferentially.<sup>146</sup> Jane suspects this to be a ploy to gain her confidence, the kind of lure that a psychiatrist or analyst might throw out to a patient by pretending to unquestionably believe the latter’s delusion. But she relents, for when the discussion is over, Instream, who she then decides is “wonderful,” tells her, in a redux of James’ reasoning, that Seth has a “massive intellect” and doesn’t at all appear to be a secondary personality. As for her, she strikes him as being in excellent emotional and psychological health.<sup>147</sup>

That was basically enough for Jane—she wasn’t crazy. Through her and Rob’s own intellectual resourcefulness, they had found their way to an individual whom, as a stray relic of a bygone scientific moment, was capable of making the very kind of judgment that was vastly improbable outside of its faded light, and that they had desperately needed.

Nonetheless, the matters of the unconscious and madness that “Instream” had addressed were only segments on the curve of the much more vast question mark that always finally punctuated anything that they could say about Seth. Who or what, after all, was he? His intellectual power and rhetorical facility were only increasing, and at a speed that barely outpaced their growing fascination with what he was already calling a “metaphysics,” and the visionary and paranormal experiences that it sparked in them. The problem the question encompassed was titanic, and would only press upon them if ignored. . .

Jane approached the question by generating another variant of it: Was Seth capable of the telepathic and clairvoyant feats that he claimed he was? The convergence of Instream’s desire to experimentally verify psychic phenomena with their own similar want was the occasion for a collaboration they thought could address the matter. And so before leaving Oswego, they agreed to participate in a simple parapsychological experiment designed by the doctor, who was, on every Monday and Wednesday at 10 pm, to concentrate mentally on an object in his home study while Seth was to give at the same moment his impressions of what the doctor might be thinking. Records of these statements were to be sent to Instream each week.

But on the drive back to Elmira, Rob hit upon his own idea, which was that the two of them should also put Seth’s clairvoyance to the test themselves, by seeing if he could successfully disclose the contents of double-sealed envelopes about which Jane would be kept in complete ignorance. Thus began a second phase of their experimentation, which was to last for over a year and involve endless congeries of things: scraps of paper abandoned in

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<sup>144</sup> *SM*, 65.

<sup>145</sup> *SM*, 66.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *SM*, 65-66.



the streets, strands of hair, worn photographs, newspaper clippings, beer coasters, bills, leaves, castoff sketches—the detritus and miscellany of everyday life, collected by Rob, as the artist he was would have in the course of assembling together sculptural collages, for a scientific endeavor that would eventually prove to be inseparable from the creativity generative of such things, including his own increasingly haunted paintings . . . .

## FLASHBACK #2: LONDON AND BOSTON, 1873-1910

The issue that had motivated James' investigation of Leona Piper's putative psychic abilities—the problem of the ground and possibility of religious belief in an increasingly disenchanted world—was also what tangled up the existential knot that the Society for Psychical Research was an attempt to untie.<sup>148</sup>

Henry Sidgwick and Frederic Meyers, two young, brilliant, and independently wealthy Oxford-educated classicists, organized the society in 1876, after a few years of investigating, in the spare moments afforded by their respective commitments to teaching philosophy and writing poetry, the clairvoyance supposedly evinced by a few mediums that had become famous as the wave of Spiritualism that had built up in England in the previous decade began to crest.

Meyers had turned to the movement's séances in hopes that witnessing firsthand the disputed phenomena associated with them might reignite his own once indomitable belief in a transcendental and spiritual world, which had been slowly and painfully crushed to pieces as his reason raised in him what became insurmountable doubts about the viability of what was not only his faith, but ardor, for Christianity. Sidgwick, exceedingly cold and more calculatingly rational than his former pupil, friend, and perhaps lover, had gone through a similar crisis of faith (resolved in favor of science when the combined force of the new German biblical criticism, John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte, and the improbability of miracles proved too much) but had not been left by it with any corresponding desire to see or taste traces of the other world now lost to him. Yet out of love for Meyers, he attended, with great ambivalence, a series of séances, after which he was persuaded by his friend that there existed cases in which mediums had evinced clairvoyant and psychokinetic abilities that warranted scientific research. For instance, one William Stanton Moses, himself an Oxford graduate and ordained minister, had furnished, while speaking for his spirit controls in the presence of witnesses, accurate information about deceased persons, including a veteran of the War of 1812 named Abraham Florentine. This "Florentine" not only gave his name and biographical details through the medium, but the date on which a corresponding person of the same name indeed died, and his exact age at the time—eighty-three years, a month, and seventeen days, a figure that inquiries to the United States confirmed to be just short of correct. (Florentine was in fact ten days older when he died.)

Meyers and Sidgwick then formed about them a small circle of other academics and scientists that included the latter's wife, Eleanor, and a polymath trained in medicine named Edward Gurney. It would shortly grow to become the Society, and then set about scrutinizing cases like Moses' (was he deceiving and a fraud, or quoting unintentionally from

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<sup>148</sup> The present section is based on Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). I made free use of Gauld's work here because of the narrative presentation I aimed for in this chapter. The book version of this dissertation will likely use less of his work but in more precise fashion.

an obituary without realizing it...?) by cross-investigating witnesses to them, corroborating information divulged by the “spirits,” and determining if the mediums themselves, once suspicion that they were frauds was eliminated, might have only known the facts they transmitted as a result of hypermnesia. While most of the core members of what then became the Society were not inspired, as Meyers was, to undertake such research in hopes that it would eventually yield a new revelation, they did wager that it would give them a scientific basis for refusing both the pessimism and (as Weber was soon to put it) unbrotherliness that had been adopted in the era by reason’s proponents, and the choice—for agnosticism—that they tried to force. Meyers and Sidgwick in particular worried that materialism might prove to be nihilism’s closest ally, and the former even spoke privately of opposing with the Society’s research the doctrines and social thought of Henry Maudslay, the then-reigning English medical materialist.

Given the sheer intellectual strength and critical power of its core members—Sidgwick’s intellect (which had easily assimilated, without formal instruction, Hebrew and Arabic) was, James later proffered, well-known in England to be “incorrigibly and exasperatingly critical and skeptical,” and acted, he claimed, “destructively on almost every particular object of belief that was offered to its acceptance,”<sup>149</sup> while Meyers, a promising if affected poet in his youth as well as a precocious classicist, was observed by a colleague to have an encyclopedic grasp of the psychology of the day (he is said to have been one of the first in England to read Janet, as well as *Studies on Hysteria*) as well as formidable knowledge of most other sciences—it is of little surprise that the Society attracted sympathetic intellectual heavyweights to itself in England, such as Charles Dodgson (aka “Lewis Carroll”), and was to count amongst its corresponding members Henri Bergson, Theodore Ribot, Charles Richet, Pierre Janet, Hippolyte Bernheim, Sigmund Freud, and William James himself. While the crowd that formed around it was not always as optimistic as the Society’s core researchers about the prospects of its basic hypothesis that the existence of psychical mental and physical phenomena could be experimentally verified, they stuck around because the research and analysis that carried forward this claim often maintained its scientificity.

Looking now at the scores of papers the endeavor yielded, nearly all of which were published in the Society’s *Proceedings*, is strange, and estranging. Their authors’ tight, inductive reasoning is applied, as would never now happen in science, to cases in which mediums either communicate what their sitters (who are often the researchers themselves) know to be ‘veridical’ information, or cause the objects, usually tables, around them to levitate, musical instruments to play themselves, and arms, hands, and vague, malformed limbs to materialize out of nothing and then touch and even knock over the sitters. Those mediums observed fishing for information from their sitters in one moment and then disseminating it as an announcement from the dead in the next, or that were determined to have discretely researched their clients’ private lives, are classed as poor research subjects and eliminated (even if they might have displayed some putative psychic ability), as are cases in which ostensible physical psychic phenomena are determined to be the result of theatrical fraud on the part of the medium herself, or her assistants—a materializing body is revealed to be a child swathed in gauze, a floating limb to merely belong to a hidden person, levitating objects to have been thrown or suspended from wires. With the casualties eliminated by these, the majority of the papers, the research proceeds to cases that hold up to their

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<sup>149</sup> William James, *Essays in Psychological Research* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 361. Hereafter cited as *EPR*.

authors' mercilessly English scrutiny: a "Miss A." receives from a spirit, amongst other confirmed "hits," the name of a seventeenth century Anglican bishop by the name of Brian Duppa, who is later determined to have presided at the cathedral she identified him with; Leorna Piper impresses James and then other researchers by identifying their family and friends by name and disclosing their secrets, and is then taken to London and isolated, in order to deprive her of the possibility of knowing or obtaining through gossip facts about the private lives of the English investigators that will sit with her, who end up confirming, after months of experimentation, the accuracy of the information furnished by her controls.

But while it is bizarre enough to encounter James and his Society friends skewering, often comically, some mediums' failures while attesting to the vast improbability of a few others' successes being due to fraud or chance, it is a work researched by Meyers, a Society member named Charles Podmore, and Edmund Gurney and principally authored by the latter, and that long held the title of the Society's flagship publication, that produces the greatest effect of estrangement. *Phantasms of the Living*, sprawled out over two volumes of nearly thirteen hundred pages and typeset in a minute font, reported upon and meticulously analyzed a dizzying body of cases in which individuals are alleged to have seen, and sometimes touched or heard speak, apparitions of living persons that then quickly vanished, and the appearance of which shortly preceded or coincided with the death of the hallucinated person.<sup>150</sup> (Hence "phantasms of *the living*.") Although the book itself, because it presents to its reader a painstakingly composed portrait of each piece of evidence or reasoning upon which its argument relies, makes for as anachronistic a read as most other works of psychology or medicine that belong to its time, there is little of surprise in this (it can be found in Bernheim, Janet, Flournoy, and Freud, for instance). What is utterly estranging about this book is that its already alien and at first glance pitiable thesis—that the phantoms about which it is concerned are almost doubtlessly hallucinations that are generated in the seer's mind upon receipt of a telepathic message from the dying person—is the outcome of a convincing and often seemingly airtight cascade of argumentation, based on a vast body of data, which says: that such 'crisis hallucinations' form a real, natural group of mental phenomena, and should be taken as a kind of thought-transmission that culminates and lies at the tail end of a continuum of observed and verified types of telepathy that begins with its simplest, experimental instances (the transfer of an image held before one person to another individual, in another room) and proceeds to spontaneous and more complex cases in which the subjects perceive from faraway, first, another's shocking emotions or physical pain, and then, scenes of events that come to pass; that the odds are quite slim that the correspondence between the crisis hallucination of a person and his or her death in the 702 cases analyzed is merely a matter of chance, as is borne out by the discrepancy between the existence of these cases and the fact that only twenty-one out of a random sample of 5,075 persons recalled ever vividly hallucinated another human being; that apparently contradictory evidence about visions collected during 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-C. witchcraft trials was frequently gathered under duress, and always without a method for determining its veracity . . . . The point is not that the conclusions of the research are correct, but that they are the product of reason itself, not dreaming stupidly in its sleep, but, as in so many instances where it generates brilliance, anxiously awake and hyperaware, jacked up and exercised by an aloof, sarcastic, and consumed personality (Gurney was disliked, eventually

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<sup>150</sup> Edmund Gurney, Frederic Meyers, and Charles Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living* (London: Rooms of the Society for Psychical Research, 1886).

even by his friends, for his arrogant manner, engaged in sustained debate with Charles Sander Pierce over *Phantasms*, and authored a philosophical treatise on aesthetics). Seeing such an exercise of rational thought at work on the behalf of what would eventually be called parapsychological research is like gazing at another, foregone, possible science that is, from today's vantage, almost unthinkable.

In a favorable review of the text, William James, after arguing that a number of the cases it presents of crisis hallucinations are weak (they do not hold up, he says, to scrutiny even more thorough than that which its authors subject them to), nonetheless states that the evidence that survived his criticism still supports their claim that "veridical hallucinations" exist, and that a theory of telepathy best explains them and provides the only means for further researching them. Moreover, after acknowledging the imprudence involved in conjecturing about the future prospects of the scientific research that was then taking Gurney's and Meyer's work as a point of departure, he predicts that they will be vindicated, perhaps in twenty-five years' time, "as the first effective prophets of a doctrine whose ineffectual prophets have been many," as belonging, then, to the winning side in the debate over the existence of mental and physical psychic phenomena. "It will surprise me," James concludes, "if neither 'telepathy' nor 'veridical hallucinations' are among the beliefs of the future."<sup>151</sup> The optimism behind James' failed gamble was shared by Frederic Meyers, who communicated to Gurney in letters that they would likely be seen as the intellectual giants of their era.

Yet the reasoning that led them to take the light on the morning horizon as a sure sign of a week's good weather for their nascent (our impossible) science was neither unique to them, nor poorly thought out. And what was said to be the repeatedly observed and verified fact that furniture floated and conveyed itself through the air during the trances of an Italian medium named Eusapia Paldino was enough to convince the scientific luminaries that investigated her séances of the reality of what would later be called psychokinesis—Charles Richet, the astronomer Schiaparelli, and two (pre-) criminologists that frequent Foucault's writings and lectures, Lombroso and Morielli, were among them. In 1909, a year before his death, twenty two years after his review of Gurney's work, and on the eve of psychoanalysis' explosive entry into the United States, James recounts these successes of psychic research in a reflection on his years of collaboration and research with the Society, entitled "Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher'." ("Confidences," and not "Confessions," which is what he considered his statements about Piper in *The Principles* to be.) After both admitting that the group was "too precipitate" in their hopes of immediate success and advising that the progress of their research will be marked not by quarter- but half or even whole centuries, and after dismissing its scientific critics, he reports—simply so they can be made, he says, public record—his own conclusions to decades of research.<sup>152</sup> He confesses himself "baffled" by whether the "spirits" that report on the secrets of their own now terminated lives in fact return, and by whether his basic intuition, that there is "something" to the reports of physical phenomena ("although I haven't yet the least positive notion of the something") is improbable and foolish, or not.<sup>153</sup> But he is confident that most of the phenomena the Society has researched not only form a natural class, but are common, and thus worthy of further research.

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<sup>151</sup> *EPR*, 27-28.

<sup>152</sup> *EPR*, 364.

<sup>153</sup> *EPR*, 371.

## EXPERIMENTAL “METAPHYSICS”

Butts’ and Roberts’ own experiments were conducted each Monday and Wednesday evening, after Seth had finished delivering the sort of “theoretical” or metaphysical lecture that increasingly interested them. Alone in his studio, Butts would select for the night’s work a few of the discarded items he’d recovered, place each in a sealed envelope sandwiched between two pieces of lightproof cardboard that in turn lined a second envelope, and then bring them to Jane. In a trance and as Seth, she would examine them mentally, either from a short distance, as they lay on the coffee table, or while touching them, sometimes by holding them to her forehead, and would then offer up whatever impressions she had received. In some cases, such as an experiment in which Butts, behind his back and without watching himself, tore out first a section from an issue chosen blindly and at random from a stack of old New York Times and then, from that, half a page, the target matter was put in another room, and then surveyed from afar before the impressions were delivered and recorded. These tended to be phrases, lone words, and descriptions of images that were then compared generously with their target—so as, Seth said, both to avoid stifling the flow of psychic data by imposing upon Jane stifling intellectual judgments, and to ensure that far from obvious ‘hits’ would be noticed.

Her impressions, as the case of the *Times*-experiment shows, often varied in quality: “A paper item, rougher than smooth background,” and “A gray view,” both of which the pair took to correspond to newspaper; “Liberal giving,” mirroring the ‘liberal discounts’ announced by an advertisement on the scrap.<sup>154</sup> “Connection with a telephone call,” for both “No mail or phone orders,” and “Mail and phone orders filled.”<sup>155</sup> “Something identical to something else,” for the twin beds advertised there; for an article about Portugal’s antiquated, substandard prisons that also references the country’s poverty relative to its Western European neighbors.<sup>156</sup> “Connection with a monstrosity, as of a monstrous building . . . A disturbance . . . A determination and a disadvantage . . . an inadequate performance”; a long statement—“A mission with unforeseen consequences . . . 1943 . . . Illia, and perhaps as F and R . . . something happening all over again, as a commemoration . . . A connection with something green, as a meadow . . . a child . . . Janurarius”—all of which corresponded, it seemed to them, to an article about a Dominican seminary founded in 1943 in Aldeia (“Illia”) Nova, Portugal, by a Father (or Fr.: “F and R”) Fernandes, and that contained vineyards, orchards, and ornamental and agricultural gardens (“green, as meadow”).<sup>157</sup> The piece also stated that Fernandes was organizing a pilgrimage commemorating the sightings by three children (“a child”) of the Virgin Mary at nearby Fatima. While the story nowhere made mention of Janurary, “Janurarius” turned out, Jane thought, to be quite relevant, because it was the surname of one of her favorite childhood teachers at the Catholic school she attended as a child.<sup>158</sup>

But the results were not always of such mixed quality, since Seth’s hits were in other instances clustered closely around or even right on the mark, as when a friend of the couple who worked in a hospital brought to Butts, without disclosing its contents, her own test envelope, which contained a page of the discarded medical chart of one of the hospital’s

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<sup>154</sup> *SM*, 89.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *SM*, 91.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

patients (!). Completely on top of things, they soon decided, Seth said the object was a single page from a book that was tied somehow to both “a family record” and a “turbulent event” (such as, Roberts observed, a hospital stay), and that a sequence of four numerals and the initial M.<sup>159</sup> appeared on it, which in fact were, respectively, a chart or identification number at a bottom corner of the page and the first letter of the patient’s name. Results like these, good, they thought, by any reasonable standard, would leave Jane soaring, while mediocre or poor showings would cause her to collapse into abjection and self-loathing. She was testing not only Seth and his use of her faculties, but her own peculiar existence with and as him.

The envelope tests yielded satisfying proof of neither his reality nor the worth of their joint being, but more spontaneous, less structured avenues for experimentation opened up and offered what Jane later took to be more enduring promises. A couple of months into the experiments, a married couple, named Bill and Peg Gallagher, who were close friends of Jane’s and Rob’s, went on vacation in Puerto Rico, and before leaving, agreed to let Seth focus on and communicate his impressions of their trip. The first of these, he announced one evening shortly after, were of a cab ride that cost three dollars (more, he said, than the Gallaghers would like to be paying for it); it was heading to a destination that is “mostly to the right after one turn” and being conducted, while Peg for some reason laughed, by an old, overweight cabbie with a short, wide neck.<sup>160</sup> When the couple returned a few weeks later, they confirmed that Seth’s remote observations were almost completely on the spot, his claim about the age of the driver excepted (he was, on the contrary, quite young, even if he looked old from the rear). They had indeed been unhappy about the price of the ride, which they took from the airport to their hotel (it had only cost two dollars the previous year) and which involved a sharp and unexpected hard right turn that was taken immediately after the driver, whose neck was thick, stubby, and coarse, ran a red light.

What impressed Jane more than the verisimilitude of the impressions was what she experienced while Seth proffered them, which was a flight out of her body into the back seat of the taxi being described, whose corner she was thrown into just as she felt sickened by a sharp veer the car was taking to the right, and from where she managed to catch a glimpse of the driver’s thick neck. She was delighted by the success of the test and the possibilities it suggested about perception, and even by the questions that were raised by the fact that she seemed to have been over a thousands miles from her body, experiencing and witnessing the very scene that Seth was simultaneously describing, even though, as it turned out, it had taken place, unbeknownst to her, a full week before the session.

Another go, taken while her friends were on this same trip, found Jane once again unmoored from her body and suddenly shooting, without any intermediate impressions, past mountains and through clouds, and then down into a balconied room in a double-story hotel set aside a channel or harbor flanking the ocean, a scene whose hold she managed to slip out of in order to ascend above the building, which she then surveyed while observing a business-clothed man crossing a blacktop parking lot before entering it. The diagram of the structure that she drew immediately afterwards was identical to a sketch Peg later produced of the hotel she was staying at on the day of the test.

An account of the two experiments was sent to Instream, along with reports about their envelope tests as well as transcriptions of the impressions Seth gave for the tests they were conducting with the professor himself. The vacation-experiments were much more fun,

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<sup>159</sup> *SM*, 97.

<sup>160</sup> *SM*, 79.

Jane and Rob thought, than the formal envelope tests, and yielded concrete and tangible results.

A few more of them proved decisive, including one conducted at the behest of two brothers who wrote Jane from Southern California after hearing about her channeling work and research. They asked that Seth attempt to look into their life, and Jane, to write back with an account of what she saw. Although she found superficiality of the brothers' request a little offensive, she nonetheless played at the requested game, and found herself during a session with Seth floating in the air above a pink stucco bungalow with two rear bedrooms and a backyard of lemon trees set on a lot that was two houses from a street corner, and that lay before a grassy field that preceded both a landscape of dunes dotted with wooden posts and a bay that lay beyond (which came farther inland to the north). The description Seth delivered of this picture was soon confirmed to be perfectly accurate by the brothers, who lived a mile from the San Diego Bay, in Chula Vista, and who signed affidavits, as witnesses to the rappings and table-turnings of Spiritualist séances once did, to that effect. All that, because it could easily be attributed to her having unwittingly constructed this vision from either an unconscious memory of a magazine article she might have once read about the town or from obvious inferences about the landscape of Southern California, might have in the end meant little to Jane, except that Seth had also described things of which she herself had seen nothing, including the immigrant status of the brothers' family (they were, the brothers later explained, Australian) and their mother's liminal status within it. Although Seth erroneously, at least from a point of view concerned with hard facts, declared her dead, his claim proved to be a decent metaphor for the emotional distance she and the family had taken from each other, and for the fact that she no longer lived continuously with them. This incident and a few more like it finally congealed, Jane was to say later, her confidence in Seth, for whatever he was, he was capable of making good on his claim about the existence of supernormal perceptual abilities, and both his and her own capacity for them.

Yet Instream and the experiments conducted with him failed to offer even the slightest support for the skeletal conceptual architecture upon which Jane was beginning to base her thinking and questioning. During the year of her disembodied gazing and Seth's play-by-play descriptions of it, Instream kept in close correspondence with her, encouraging her to overcome the boredom her research brought and to keep at it, but without opining in either the affirmative or negative, or even mentioning, the envelope experiments, her voyages, and Seth's twice-weekly reports of what the psychologist was focusing on in his study. Silence about the latter endeavor was understandable, they at first thought, since Instream was probably maintaining certain controls on the experiment. But Jane was becoming anguished by his increasing truncated letters, which more and more simply amounted to encouragement and assurances of his interest minced by explanations that he didn't yet have any evidence that could convince a skeptical fellow psychologist. An imagined Instream, now become for her the subject supposed to know (about reason, science, and thus also reality) and audience of her ecstasies, even came to haunt her psyche during Seth's séances, especially those in which she was to produce data for the doctor (in a feeble attempt to defy him, she would consider abandoning these for evenings out).

The weeks and months of experimentation were flying by her, often without a word from Instream, who even neglected to respond to news Seth sent that he would soon be taking a professorship at a major Midwestern university (which he indeed did), and she flayed herself with the thought that all of her work with Rob might prove, through their failure or Instream's neglect, to be a sheer waste, and in desperation even wrote Instream, requesting that he not spare her feelings, and simply come out with an honest, if

unfavorable, assessment of the existing data. But the same curt but polite, encouraging response was the only thing returned to her, and would remain all that was in the coming months.

Another trip by the Gallaghers, coupled with another successful description from Seth of their destination, closed the circle of their year of experimentation, which was fixed together without the validating seal they'd hoped Instream would provide. But it ended up not mattering: Jane had in the meantime wrested herself from and exorcised the anxiety that Instream's authority provoked, and had set herself upon another course of reasoning, which she imaginarily volleyed back to the psychologist, who was, she decided, admirably captured by an obsession with obtaining evidence for telepathy and clairvoyance, but ignorant of the methods and conclusions of the parapsychology that had sprung up after James' day. Was he even aware, she asked, that "the existence of telepathy and clairvoyance had been scientifically proven time and time again by J.B. Rhine at Duke University and demonstrated by others," or was he simply ignoring and dispensing with their conclusions? And if he was indeed ignorant of the relevant literature and data, then could he actually arrive at a reliable method that could demonstrate the statistical improbability that whatever hits Seth's communications contained were merely chance? And what about Seth's correct impressions?

"Enough of them would have added up to something. So would a high enough percentage of hits on names and dates and so forth, statistics or no."<sup>161</sup> Besides, she and Rob had begun to form conclusions that were becoming aspects of their own *savoir-faire*. Psychic data, it seemed to them, very often arrived in a form that resembled sense data (usually images, but sometimes sounds) that language could only and secondarily describe; and Seth's own impressions were often at their most accurate when they concerned facts that held emotional and psychological significance to the target person—and Instream wouldn't be able to account for either thing. Both the experiments with him and those involving the envelopes were terminated, and the sessions continued, although now Jane entered them with a great deal of certainty that Seth, whatever he (or she herself) was, indeed perceived and knew in a way that could be confirmed, and that this baseline was a foundation upon which she could both build future hypotheses, assail and test them with the doubts that future problems would raise in her, and pursue the questions that the entire endeavor kept raising.

## THE SCIENCE OF JANE

To some extent then, Jane survived a trial of reason that our epoch demanded from her, and which she called to order as best she could by submitting Seth and herself to psychiatry and experimental science for examination, and then asking some of their representatives to take the stand as witnesses alongside themselves. However, the particular law that was necessary for adjudicating their case could only, because it belonged only to the decades in which it was written and then left unfinished, be found wanting, and so it was up to Jane herself to attempt to stitch it back together from whatever leftovers of it remained in the present, and even, in the end, to interpret it herself. Instream's absence left her the only judge on the bench, and in the circumstance that modernity in fact finally always lays down to its incipient subjects: to stand alone before both a law (which is also a science) that is embodied by oneself and all the witnesses called forward by this self against itself, which are

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<sup>161</sup> *SM*, 90.



once again this self's doubles, and whose testimony is evaluated by another legion of this diced up self so that a verdict can be made, and perhaps as well a sentence laid down or renewed. This trial is even said to be an ongoing and even endlessly reenacted ritual, in which I am always scrutinizing and staring down at and through myself, enduring and suffering under the burning light of my own omnipresent gaze, in which I attempt to bring myself into line with what my own stare wants from me, and in which I admit to the other ears of mine all my failures to do so. Hence Foucault's two names for this inevitable process by which we are made subjects: surveillance and confession, both of which never occur solely within the concrete legal, psychiatric, and medical practices that are the condition and means by which the subject is made, but transpire as well (and perhaps, today, primarily) within the psychic interior that it in part fabricates.

Jane responded to the watchful eyes science had installed or augmented within her, and voluntarily turned herself in for an examination that might have, had she either refused or failed it, condemned her to unintelligibility and the complete failure of her subjectivity. But she passed the test, and her success at self-administering it perhaps garnered her a high mark on another exam, which showed both that she was capable, as psychoanalysis would say, of testing reality by distinguishing ideas and objects that are true from those that are false (of knowing, as a person immersed in psychosis cannot, the difference between reality and delusion) and that she had accepted a more primordial law than any of those codified by the state and buttressed by science. In short, she by no means appeared to be clinically psychotic. Emerging with high marks from this subtly violent encounter with a series of figures of the law allowed her to proceed forward in understanding herself, in a movement that turned away from whatever might have blocked her way, and toward the achievement of scientific knowledge: from grave doubts about Seth and her perceptions to certainty of the reality of both, from the risk and possibility of madness to surety about her sanity, and from the specter of delusion to the concreteness of recognition. Obeying the compulsion of a law at once disciplinary-scientific and psychic, she cobbled together from the refuse of modern reason an apparatus by which she was able to test herself and then acquire the prize awarded to the victor: certainty, and a claim to subjectivity.

Even if this newfound legitimacy was mostly something she conferred upon herself, it gave her enough confidence to accept Seth's suggestion to teach at her home weekly classes on the development of extrasensory perception; they would both lecture in these, he said, and lead students through "psychic exercises." Businessmen, college students, artists that were amongst the couple's friends, and even a group of East Village proto-hippie beats would converge upon Jane's apartment each week to attend a participatory theater, in which they took in the radiation emitted by Seth's discourse in order both to undergo the same mutations in experience that Jane and her husband were, and to receive a knowledge that was beginning to stabilize, no matter how precariously.

The classes, just like the regular sessions the couple continued to conduct, was a self-founded space in which Seth's discourse could congeal and authorize itself, while also receiving moral sanction and even further experimental verification from its addressees. In the absence of the legitimacy that science and its institutions (not to speak of religion) would never confer upon Seth, the class provided an arena, however marginal, in which a knowledge that was still without a proper place or shape could begin to take incipient form...

Shortly into this new endeavor, Jane was presented with another opportunity to prove her new and burgeoning autonomy, which came via a request from one of her students that Seth dialogue once more with scientific knowledge, this time by delivering a

lecture on his conception of personality in the psychology class of a local professor, which the student also attended. The invitation accepted, Seth not only expounded quite characteristically upon the nature of personality by differentiating it from the identity of the soul (“Identity is not the same as personality. Personality represents only those aspects of identity that you are able to actualize within three-dimensional existence”), but he also clarified himself and the nature of his own existence by criticizing psychology, particularly psychoanalysis.<sup>162</sup> “You have here a provocative demonstration of the nature of personality,” he said. “for my personality is not Jane’s, nor is his mine. I am not a secondary personality, for instance. I make no attempt to dominate Jane’s life, nor indeed would I expect her to allow it. [ . . . ] [S]he is hardly the repressed type on her own!”<sup>163</sup> The speech was pointed and exact in its refusal of scientific knowledge, and was directly addressed to the professor:

You may if you wish, call me a subconscious production. I do not particularly enjoy such a designation, since it is not true. So if you do call me a subconscious extension of Jane’s own personality, then you must agree that the subconscious is telepathic and clairvoyant, since I have shown telepathic and clairvoyant abilities. So, may I remind you, has Jane on her own . . . However, unless you are willing to assign to the subconscious those abilities – and most of your colleagues do not – then I cannot be considered to have a subconscious origin.

If you *are* willing to concede the point, then I have other arguments. My memories are not the memories of a young woman. My mind is not a young woman’s mind. I have been used to many occupations, and Jane has no memory of them. I am not a father image of Jane’s, nor am I the male figure that lurks in the back of the female mind. Nor does our friend Jane have homosexual tendencies. I am simply an energy essence personality, no longer materialized in physical form. . . . [Jane’s] ego has been carefully coddled and protected. It had not been shunted aside. Instead it has been taught new abilities . . . I was not artificially brought to birth through hypnosis. There was no artificial tampering of personality characteristics here. There was no hysteria. Jane allows me to use the nervous system under highly controlled conditions. I am not given blanket permission to take over when I please, nor would I desire to do so.<sup>164</sup>

Although Jane herself did not reflect upon it in her account of the event, she had undergone a sea change in her relationship to science, which is here simply negated and refused, and no longer allowed to pass judgment on the legitimacy of her existence or to demand that she answer to the proxy it once had in her conscience. In a fitting close to more than a year of putting herself, her other persona, and her reason to a difficult test, Jane made with Seth a lucid declaration of their independence from science, and of the possibility that they could found a space of intelligibility for themselves somewhere in the margins and ghettos of social life.

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<sup>162</sup> *SM*, 209.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *SM*, 210-211.

## “THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSONALITY”

Yet the triumph of the ego and another reason are obviously far from the culmination or entirety of the story. While Jane had answered the demand (which she placed upon herself) to submit to the law of science and to endure and enact its tests of her very being, she responded as she did so that she could address questions about her and Seth’s subjectivity that upended whatever certainty she had just established. “Now we could concentrate upon the Seth Material,” Jane said after the experiments had been stopped; “freed from the test structure . . . the sessions were free to go places.”<sup>165</sup>

With the tests passed, she launched more deeply into the dissociation and depersonalization that the trance required to make Seth happen. The paradox was that to bring him in, she had to put her newly strengthened self out; to make him be, she had to render herself something of a non-entity; and to let him speak, she had to place to the side all but the small margin of certainty she possessed. And with him in, a knowledge could be elaborated that would allow her to continue to bring into sharp focus her questioning, and answer it with a shower of discourse; this would pool into concepts that came to organize the mystical and limit experiences that accompanied it, and redistributed all the stray, homeless fragments of the reality it kept unraveling. Whatever was speaking from beyond her was now free to follow a course of thinking in which reason would not be allowed to play the lead role, and which would raise for Jane and the many readers she was soon to have as many questions as it addressed, and dissolve as much reality as it reconstituted.

In the months and years that followed 1965, Seth expanded upon his metaphysics, and his discourse turned increasingly to the soul, and to the multiple incarnations he claimed it undergoes. He had spoken of reincarnation from the beginning, but the increasing number of anguished people that contacted Jane with requests that Seth illumine the crises that burdened their lives elicited explanations from Seth that called for further thinking.

A man, for instance, wanting to know why his wife, stricken with what was likely a fatal case of multiple sclerosis, suffers to the extent she does, and what the reasons are for his apparent fate as her caretaker, is told that they had once lived together in the sixteenth century, she as the widowed father of a neurotic daughter who she spent much of her life caring for, and he as the husband this daughter married in an act that she, as the father, saw condemning her to a lonely existence as an aged bachelor. His wife had come together with him now, Seth said, so that she could know the virtues of the very psyche that she had then despised as her ruin by receiving from him the care she now needed as a severely ill person, a role that was allowing her to understand the significance of such suffering (something she had refused at all cost to contemplate in the other time, when she resented her then-daughter for her seemingly senseless illness). As for the husband, his present wife’s pain was an opportunity her psyche was in turn giving him to profoundly contemplate the questions of purpose he now was, and that he would not have otherwise found his way to in this lifetime.<sup>166</sup>

The situations that drove people to Jane were not always protracted crises like this, but nonetheless involved persistent and gnawing existential dilemmas. A young New York publishing agent, for instance, is told that he hides from himself and the world a sense of dread provoked when he gives himself to other people. This is what he did during two

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<sup>165</sup> *SM*, 92.

<sup>166</sup> See *SM*, 136-138.

lifetimes devoted to nurturing others, and which he avoided in another pair of lives by alienating the world so that he could withdraw within to develop himself. “A fear of identity escaping and running outward,” was Seth’s characterization of the anxiety the publisher and his doubles felt in the face of others. “My cup runneth over, and there will be nothing left of me.”<sup>167</sup> The publisher was reportedly astonished by this analysis, which was coupled to a narrative about a lifetime he was said to have spent as a monk involved in botanical research in fourteenth century Bordeaux—the setting, unbeknownst to Jane, of a play about a monk he had written a few years earlier.

Seth’s increasing discussion of reincarnation returned Jane to the question of identity that her mediumship had long before provoked in her, but whose wider and quite vast scope was now becoming apparent to her. If Seth’s claim that the psyche undergoes multiple incarnations was correct, she reasoned, then identity and subjectivity always involve the paradox that channeling him had already suggested. Seth’s advice to the suffering never returned them to themselves alone, but to someone else—an other with whom they shared some kind of identity. He had, moreover, already suggested that the belief in the identity of the ego was false, for the psyche congeals from its various potentials a series of egos throughout a lifetime, so that, as she said in light of this, “the Jane Roberts of now is different than the Jane Roberts of ten years ago, though ‘I’ have not been conscious of any particular change of identity.”<sup>168</sup> And finally, Seth had also explained in great detail that the psyche never incarnates as a single individual, but as multiple versions of this individual, what he called “probable selves,” which are probable only to each other, and actual to themselves. He compared these selves to the multiple channels on the recorder that Rob sometimes used to tape him: all the selves, each a channel of sound on a tape, can be heard in unison by the soul alone and not by themselves, yet sound from a self’s channel often bleeds onto another’s, where the latter hears it. In light of all this, Jane’s question—of who or what Seth was—was starting to morph to become, Who or what is any person?

Initial clarification came by way of reference to a psychopathology that Jane perhaps thought she had left behind. Seth had already so insisted on the illusory nature of time that a student in Jane’s class was able to question him as to how he reconciled the idea with his equal emphasis on reincarnation, which implied that the psyche led a serial existence. His response, immediate and lucid, complicated the meaning of the sanity Jane had recently identified as her own by exposing a madness that hides in plain sight within any personal identity.

Yes, he said, time is indeed an illusion: the physical senses, themselves dependent on man’s neurological structure and the kind of intelligibility proper to organic existence, force upon you the perception that life moves forward, sequentially and across a line, which conceals the reality that everything in the universe exists simultaneously, in a plural but atemporal now. “When I tell you,” he continued, “that you lived in 1836, I say this because it makes sense to you now. You live all your reincarnations at once, but you find this difficult to understand in the context of three-dimensional reality.”<sup>169</sup> By way of analogy, he compared the questioner’s psyche to a sleeper, dreaming lucidly each night a different lifetime that from within may appear to last a century, but which the dreamer knows occur in no time at all. And as to the present individual who seems to be his interlocutor, she herself

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<sup>167</sup> *SM*, 153.

<sup>168</sup> *SM*, 212.

<sup>169</sup> *SM*, 148.

is never finally distinguishable from these others. “What you have,” instead of a succession of discrete existences, “is something like the development narrated in *The Three Faces of Eve*,” the then-famous popular clinical account of a case of multiple personality disorder. “You have dominant egos, all a part of an inner identity . . . But the separate existences exist simultaneously. Only the egos involved make the time distinction.”<sup>170</sup> And there is thus no absolute difference between the identities of the ego and its others, for, as Jane recounted Seth saying, “It is interesting that the personalities in *The Three Faces* did alternate, and all were in existence at once, so to speak, even though only one was in existence at any given time. In the same way, so-called past personalities are present in you now but not dominant.”<sup>171</sup>

In drawing this analogy with multiple personality, Jane-as-Seth lucidly grasped the nature of the condition as it has often been described by those suffering from it: a situation in which consciousness and volition (what the psychiatry of dissociation called “executive control” of mind and body) are assumed and possessed by a series of selves that successively displace each other from this position of seeming agency, but that continue an inner dialogue with each other and the everyday “host personality” after they have receded to the background—and which are never finally differentiable from each other. (There are therefore even therapies that forego integrating these alter personalities into a unitary subject, but cure by eliminating the periodic nature of the crises and effectuating a paradoxical ‘co-presence’ between all these selves.) Seth was effectively saying that while the ‘I’ can manage to speak in a voice of its own, its words, its thoughts, and itself may indeed come from a legion of selves with which it shares a paradoxical identity.

As a claim about consciousness itself, this incipient conceptualization of the psyche, which Jane/Seth soon after christened (coining a neologism that looks to have been an intentional inversion of psychiatric nomenclature) “the multidimensional personality,” began the movement of his discourse toward problems of identity and difference that have continually arisen in modern thought when the self has been thought, often at madness’ provocation. Seth—or as should be repeated a few more times: Seth-Jane, Jane-Seth—was not tritely echoing Rimbaud’s celebrated formula (whether Jane had encountered his “*Je est un autre*” scarcely matters, given what was to follow), but elaborating upon it in a way that had so far been highly improbable in modernity . . .

#### FLASHBACK #3—BERLIN 1820, PARIS 1950-1961

When it dampened the alien luminescence of the multiple personalities and control spirits that fascinated the psychology of the nineteenth century, psychoanalysis was not alone in refurbishing the idea and reality of the subject generated by Descartes and implanted into human beings by the disciplinary techniques that spread out over Europe and North America, and (in more insidious and barbaric ways) into the colonies throughout the rest of the world. Philosophy also confronted the doubles and spirits that proliferated around magnetism and Spiritualism, and exorcised them in favor of subjectivity: Although Hegel, unlike Kant in his repudiation of Swedenborg, could both accept clairvoyance, magnetism, and mediums and find a place for them in his system, they also exemplified for him the failure of subjectivity that results when an individual can no longer assimilate and overcome

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<sup>170</sup> SM, 149.

<sup>171</sup> SM, 149.

difference—the difference between the individual and its sensations, or its world, or the magnetist, but really, the difference of difference itself. Even if Hegel indeed regarded dialectics as an open and always-unfinished business in which difference never finally trumps identity, subjectivity, in his texts themselves, is always in the end self-return, overcoming of the other, and the triumph of identity. Which is perhaps why, when Lacan under Hegel's influence worked through him a synthesis of psychoanalysis and speculative philosophy proper, hysteria and the speech of the unconscious could so easily serve for him as figures and models of subjectivity (and eventually inspire a work of thought that began with the title *Hegel: The Most Sublime of Hysterics*). And thus, jettisoning from philosophy a subject that could no longer be thought apart from psychoanalysis required characterizing thinking as psychosis, as everything that neurosis was not—hence the importance to Deleuze of Artaud. Yet what Freud and then Lacan, with Hegel's help, had obscured was that hysteria and the Spiritualist doubling that had once been so proximate to it, far from lending support to a theory of the subject, suggested its impossibility—even its irrelevance, if the psyche can readily manifest itself as a Hydra. But it was quite difficult to see that in the France of the 1960s and 1970s, when a choice between neurosis and psychosis was nearly always forced by psychoanalysis.

... Hence the improbability of making from within the confines of philosophy or the human sciences of the time Seth's declaration that the person and psyche are multiple, and that because it shares an identity with the others within it, the subject has no final reality. Saying this required being, as Jane was, an outlier—a remarkably creative writer with a virtually untrained but often brilliant intellect who found herself practicing something that nearly the entirety of modernity sees as irredeemably stained with what it regards as religion's most primitive face, but who also managed to conceptualize her possession in a way that can impact a thinking that appears quite distant from it. But as improbable as Jane and Seth were, they had what was then still a barely discovered antecedent.

#### FLASHBACK #4: DURBIN AND LISBON, 1888-1935

Whatever the importance of the formal innovativeness and originality of Fernando Pessoa's oeuvre and the diverse themes it addresses (from the sacred to aesthetics to nationalism to modernity), the basic and radically singular conditions of its authorship remains a question that has been hardly formulated, let alone addressed.

The heteronyms were not only signatures affixed to four bodies of poetry that each realized an equal number of distinct aesthetic projects, for as the correspondence and unfinished introductions to their work left by Pessoa say quite clearly, they were also the personalities that somehow animated these, and which were somehow distinct from the individual from whom they emerged. As Pessoa put it in the famous letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, the condition of the heteronyms' existence is his hysterical physical constitution, which never explicitly manifested itself in a visible interpersonal drama, but only appeared in an inner life characterized by incessant depersonalization and an equally tireless capacity to dramatize himself by generating other, internal selves. So well before Alberto Caeiro, Alvaro de Campo, and Ricardo Reis had appeared, Pessoa spent his childhood fabricating in his imagination fictitious persons that for him possessed more reality than anything outside himself: "the Chevalier de Pas," from whom, Pessoa said, he received letters at the age of six, the imaginary journalists that wrote the copy of the mock newspapers he compiled in his early teens, and then the "Alexander Search" of his late adolescence, the author of 150

poems, a Poe-like detective story, and perhaps even the fragment in which the author, reflecting back upon his life, says, “I was a poet animated by philosophy, not a philosopher with poetic faculties.”<sup>172</sup> Whether or not all children invent such imaginary friends, Pessoa says to Monteiro, I never stopped doing so, and “I lived them so intensely that I live them still; their memory is so strong that I have to remind myself that they weren’t real . . .

This tendency to create around me another world, just like this one but with other people, has never left my imagination. It has gone through various phases, including the one that began in me as a young adult, when a witty remark that is out of keeping with who I am or who I think am would sometimes and for some unknown reason occur to me, and I would immediately, spontaneously say it as if it came from some friend of mine, whose name I would invent, along with biographical details, and whose figure—physiognomy, stature, dress, and gestures—I would immediately see before me. Thus I elaborated, and propagated, various friends and acquaintances who never existed but whom I feel, hear, and see even today, almost thirty years’ later. I repeat: I feel, hear, and see them. And I miss them.<sup>173</sup>

All this is what Pessoa recounts to Monteiro just before explaining the births of each of the three chief heteronyms, as if only this biographical sketch (however fictitious) will render intelligible the circumstances of Caeiro’s appearance and then those of de Campo and Reis. Those surrounding Caeiro’s appearance are well-known, but are worth repeating here. Wanting to play a joke on a friend, Pessoa tries in vain for days to invent in himself a poet capable of penning laughably intricate bucolic verse, and when he is about to give up, he tries a last time, and then suddenly and in a few mere hours produces—“in a kind of ecstasy I’m unable to describe”—most of the thirty-some poems that *The Keeper of Sheep* comprises. And right afterwards, a person Pessoa immediately names Alberto Caeiro materializes—“Excuse the absurdity of this statement: my master had appeared within me.”<sup>174</sup> Not long after, Pessoa is able to name and give form to Ricardo Reis, who had until then been only an incipient self vaguely associated with the former’s wish to write the sort of classically-influenced poetry that the latter then realized. This is followed by the “impetuous” birth of Alvaro de Campos when one of his modernist, Whitmanesque odes issues out of Pessoa in a clamorous and uninterrupted stream. Thus Caeiro, the sage whose empty, simple way of seeing is often said to be worthy of comparison with that of the Presocratics or ancient Taoists, is given these two disciples, and the respective aesthetic-philosophical doctrines that his almost unspeakable perspective inspires in them: Reis’ Neopaganism, which revivifies Epicureanism in order to say that an experience of the divine can, in modernity, be found within sensory experience, and de Campo’s Sensationism, which claims that intense sensation provides knowledge of reality. Over time, these three figureheads of what Pessoa called his “non-existent coterie” are joined by others personas, heteronyms and mere pseudonyms, major and minor: an English writer who translates and writes commentaries on them; the semiheteronym, Bernardo Soares, who authored *The Book of Disquiet*, and who Pessoa regarded as merely a “mutilation of my own personality”; the author “Fernando

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<sup>172</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa*, ed. Richard Zenith (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 9. Hereafter cited as *FP*.

<sup>173</sup> *FP*, 255.

<sup>174</sup> *FP*, 256.

Pessoa,” who called himself a double of the first Pessoa (since the latter is without any personal identity); the Baron de Tieve, and so on. “At this point,” Pessoa says to Monteiro after recounting some of this history, “you’re no doubt wondering what bad luck has caused you to fall, just by reading, into the midst of an insane asylum.”<sup>175</sup>

The point of sketching the most familiar landmarks of this delirious landscape is neither to celebrate its intricacies nor to propose psychobiography as the key to interpreting it, but to show that within the individual named Fernando Pessoa there converged conditions, at once within and outside history, that gave rise to a unique “subjectivity” and a singular conceptualization of “the subject” that are both relevant here. The selections made by Richard Zenith for the primary English collection of Pessoa’s prose—letters, dialogues, introductions, and commentaries that focus to a great degree on the poet’s psychic life, his possible madness, and the interrelationships between the major heteronyms—lend themselves to much more than the biographical understanding of his oeuvre that might all too easily be applied to them. The description by Pessoa of the independence of the heteronyms and of the compulsive, spontaneous quality of his tendency to personify them into existence found in both his letter to Monteiro and the equally famous unfinished introduction to *Aspects* (the proposed title of his projected complete works) is illuminated by these often personal fragments, which show that the psyche of the individual through whom they were authored belonged to a species that both psychiatry and Spiritualism were then continually discovering and fabricating in their own ways.

It is not simply that Pessoa considered himself mad, as shown by both his admissions to Monteiro and his characterization of himself, in “Aspects,” as “at worst a lunatic with grandiose dreams, at best not just a writer but an entire literature,”<sup>176</sup> but that the blatant divergence of Pessoa’s self-experience and psychic organization from those of his contemporaries was intelligible to him as a deviation from some norm—as pathology. If Pessoa does not, as he says in another account of the birth of the heteronyms, reject psychiatric explanations of his personas, it is because that science was a condition of their intelligibility, and thus also of their existence.

The translated fragments show that Pessoa was obsessed from an early age with the possibility and then reality of his madness. His paternal grandmother, with whom he lived in Lisbon during his young adulthood, was frequently hospitalized in asylums prior to death, and he was so aware of theories of the hereditary transmission of mental illness that he posed as a psychiatrist in order to write his former teachers and schoolmates in South Africa to inquire as to whether he evinced in his youth signs of a constitutional disposition to madness. During this time, the possible heteronym “Anon” writes fragments with psychotic qualities, while another, Alexander Search, agonizes about his tendency to manically elaborate hundreds of plans that his enervated will is incapable of realizing. And it is to this last faculty that Pessoa returns much later in life, whenever he characterizes his psyche, as he does in a letter written to two French magnetists. While his labile and divided emotional life, he writes there, clearly marks him as a hysteric, he is also able to keep this instability internal, and thus not manifest the malingerer, dissimulating, and overt drama that characterize the disease. But his will, on the other hand, is that of a neurasthenic—fatigued and disabled—so that he is incapable of decision and action, and it is this symptom that most plagues him. Elsewhere, he links this lack of volition to his empty emotional life, saying that both are a

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<sup>175</sup> FP, 139.

<sup>176</sup> FP, 3.



result of his essentially depersonalized and hyperrational mind, which can only act and feel through these other personalities. All the lucidity Pessoa here evinces about the nature and conditions of his at once depersonalized and multiplied psyche entails not only the recognition of a fact, but also its manufacture. For although his peculiar psychic life, apparent since childhood, clearly grew upon soil either familial-psychological or biological (or both), psychiatry came to contaminate it further than it already had, providing in its classifications and descriptions of neurosis both a model and an idiom for Pessoa's self-multiplication. All his self-diagnoses show that no matter how innate this drive to dissociate and proliferate, its actualization was accomplished in part through its filtration through grids of intelligibility that strained out some of its elements and enabled others to synthesize themselves into a new kind of being. So psychiatry was in no way ever external to Pessoa's extraordinary descriptions of depersonalization ("Everything slips away from me. My whole life, my memories, my imagination and all it contains, my personality: it all slips away. I constantly feel that I was someone different, that a different I felt, that a different I thought. I'm watching a play with a different, unfamiliar setting, and what I'm watching is me."<sup>177</sup>), which it shaped and "in-formed."

While that should be no surprise, the additional subtractive and combinatory work performed by a Spiritualist-esoteric discursive grid perhaps is. Although Pessoa's occultism was central to his work, it does not yet appear to be legible to many of those interpreting and appropriating it. Neglecting its role in conditioning both his psychic organization and his conceptualization of the heteronyms obscures the fact that psychiatry was not alone in shaping his dissociative or "possessive" faculty.

Beyond his extensive reading in Western religious esotericism, his personal papers reveal, Pessoa was also during his late twenties the medium for a number of "spirits," including that of the sixteenth century English Platonic philosopher Henry More, who advised the poet on professional and personal matters, even cautioning him to stay away from de Campos. Through the influence of an aunt, Pessoa had by then been exposed to Spiritualism and esoteric religious thought, which led to his translating into Portuguese four books by the main figures of the Theosophical Society (Colonel Leadbetter, Annie Besant, and Madame Blavatsky). But in the letter in which he confides to this aunt that he has become a medium, he indicates that he was by no means a believer in their doctrine or Spiritualism by acknowledging that she must no doubt be surprised by his news, since he only hindered with his unbelief and rationalism the séances that has occurred in her house during his youth. The impulse to write automatically nonetheless seized him, he says, and spirits—first a deceased uncle, then more mysterious entities—began articulating through him enigmatic messages replete with mysterious, pseudo-Kabbalistic symbols. But much else occurred, for soon after, he began experiencing a special sort of vision by means of which he saw auras around people, and even, glowing through his clothes, the ribs of another man. Sometimes, Pessoa continues, "I suddenly have the sensation that I belong to something else," followed by involuntary movements of his limbs. "I know enough of the occult sciences to realize that . . . the unknown master who is initiating me, by imposing upon me this higher existence, is going to make me feel a suffering deeper than I've ever known."<sup>178</sup> This "master" was perhaps Thomas More, perhaps one of the other many spirits that battled

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<sup>177</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 186. Hereafter cited as *BD*.

<sup>178</sup> *FP*, 102.

with the philosopher over Pessoa, and whom More cautioned had formed an “astral conspiracy” against the poet:

No man can imagine what your soul is. So many are the discarnate presences around it that it seems, from here, a nucleus of your fate. No defense is possible unless you obey the dictates of your higher self and decide to manifest your being in goodness and beauty . . . Your destiny is too high for me to say it. You must find it out. But you must work your way up through the chain of many lives, up to the royal Divine Presence in your soul.<sup>179</sup>

While Pessoa’s occult face certainly appears psychotic (a problem for further down the road), it is evidence that another set of discursive conditions not only helped bring the heteronyms into being, but profoundly enabled the poet to understand them as he did. Right up until the letter to Monteiro and his death soon after, Pessoa maintained this deep engagement with esotericism. In the letter, he explains to his interlocutor his relation to the occult by professing belief in a pyramid of higher and increasingly subtle worlds inhabited by spiritual beings, which eventually culminates in that of God, who he understands to be the Platonic demiurge. In the two decades that lay between then and his automatic writing episodes, Pessoa practiced astrology, drawing up the charts of other great writers and theorizing the practice under yet another pseudonym, collected a library of three hundred esoteric books, and corresponded with the English occultist Alistair Crowley, who even paid a visit to him in Lisbon.

Without that history and his candid statements of belief in hand, many of Pessoa’s most evocative passages about the heteronyms and his experience of multiplicity make little sense. Amongst them are the many in which he characterizes his soul as spiritual or immaterial, such as one in “Aspects” in which he says that “the author of these books cannot affirm that all these different and well-defined personalities who have incorporeally passed through his soul don’t exist, for he does not know what it means to exist.”<sup>180</sup> Tied up with them are the many lines in which doubt about objective reality is expressed, and claims are made about its true nature (“perhaps other individuals with this same, genuine kind of reality will appear in the future,” he says of his multiplicity), along with some in which the characteristics usually ascribed it to are inverted in a manner common to religious esotericism and the Hindu traditions that influenced it: “The relation that exists between sleep and life is the same that exists between life and death. We’re sleeping, and this life is a dream, not in a metaphorical or poetic sense, but in a real sense.”<sup>181</sup> There are also the explicit references to reincarnation and to the existence of other worlds. “[I]t does sadden me that I can’t dream of myself as, say, two kings in different kingdoms that belong to different kinds of time and space . . . It smacks to me of going hungry.”<sup>182</sup> And finally, there are times when Pessoa wishes to be the godlike being that esoteric discourse says the soul is:

To create in myself a nation with its own politics, parties, and revolutions, and to be all of it, everything, to be God in the real pantheism of this people-I, to be the

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<sup>179</sup> *FP*, 109.

<sup>180</sup> *FP*, 2.

<sup>181</sup> *BD*, 158.

<sup>182</sup> *BD*, 141.

substance and movement of their bodies and their souls, of the very ground they tread and the acts they perform! To be everything, to be them and not them!<sup>183</sup>

These examples in no way demonstrate that Pessoa—who was, after all, often as disenchanted a materialist as Nietzsche—was really a proponent of the supernatural and a vaguely religious Good. But they show the influence upon him of a body of religious thought quite foreign to the letters and sciences in which he was otherwise immersed, and whose ascription to the soul of immortality, multiple incarnations, and a vivid inner sight seem to have allowed Pessoa to think and sense the heteronym-personalities as living human beings utterly distinct from him, existing in a reality more true than the objective world of waking life.

It is the late convergence in Pessoa of Spiritualism and esotericism with the psychology to which it had been proximate and even conjoined in the decades prior to his adulthood that in part generated his almost singular psychic organization, and the concept of the heteronym itself. And it is in light of that conjuncture that the many still unexamined insights to be found in Pessoa's fragmented commentary on the self—which amount to a peculiar claim about how it is always irrecoverably different from itself—ought to be understood: as an apprehension, in which what is grasped is water that immediately slips away, of the impossibility of cognizing with consciousness and as an object the differences that compose us, and a proposal that a strange asceticism, neither secular nor religious, might somehow open us to those variations, so that we are no longer “ourselves” anymore. There are thoughts and procedures suggested by Pessoa that are quite close to those Jane lived and invented, and which suggest the probability of fabricating other realities with the senses, and though a kind of pluralization . . .

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<sup>183</sup> *BD*, 141.

“AN EXPERIENCE IN CONCEPTS”

*The experimental character of Jane’s mystical itinerary did not stop when the tests she and Rob ran on Seth did. Instead, the “experiments,” as she continued as Seth to characterize them, took another form. Given, he said, that the reality of the psyche can only be difficultly accessed or expressed through discursive means and thus also the concepts he intended to teach the couple, “both of you [will] achieve experiences that will fill out the words for you . . . and give you a feel for the concepts whenever possible.”<sup>184</sup> The experiences—which were most often visions of Jane’s—were directly “of” states of consciousness the concepts characterized. This chapter recounts a number of these experiences in order to present what amounted to Jane’s intellectual/mystical method: after formulating questions about her experiences or Seth’s teaching that were profound enough that she could not address them, her psyche (the reader should read “psyche” as she will) offers her visions that provide answers, albeit in an imagistic form that must later be “translated” into discursive terms (which always eventually raise more questions...). As Jane becomes familiar with this sequence, she becomes, both as herself and “Seth,” more confident that mystical-visionary experience and critical, intellectual reflection can support each other and be joined together. Her own questions thus proliferate here, and she demands, as Seth, that her readers not only intuitively grow but “intellectually expand.” The other general aim of this chapter, then, is to show this further development of her thinking into something that deserves to be called intellectual.*

*This does not mean, though, that her thinking has yet taken either a manifestly speculative form or one in which her questions, Seth’s answers, and her visions are tightly enough articulated to result in precise concepts (these aspects of the form of her thinking will emerge, respectively, in chapters three and four). What is found in this chapter are first versions of speculations on matters—not only the plural psyche but nonlinear, plastic time, its consequences for the individual’s relationship to death, and a nonoriginary “God”—that become some of Jane’s distinctive conceptual inventions once they are further refined. These incipient speculations are presented here, then, not only because they are part of her story but so that the reader will also have a full sense of the context of their development before they are interpreted in terms as speculative and conceptual as those they will eventually take.*

*The polemical point of this chapter and its title—“an experience in concepts”—is that anthropology, even when it refuses the savage slot and the sociohistorical reduction, may sometimes be confronted with concepts: terms so basic that they effectively cast and recast the entirety of the real in their light and are thus irreducible to terms of analysis cast in another mold. When that happens, the master terms of the discipline—practice, the body, ethics, the social, the contemporary—may not only prove useless but have their own conceptual and thus derivative status exposed. But anthropology can also then become conceptual in its own right. This is to say that it can work to understand concepts not indigenous to the human sciences and then allow these concepts to enter said sciences as concepts and thereby transform them. Would any other anthropology really be capable of an encounter with people, like Jane, practiced in the arts of the question and the concept?*

*If the psyche was to be multiple—a self formed of “selves multiplied,”<sup>185</sup> a conglomerate of “multitudinous selves with their own identities”<sup>186</sup> that are at once “separate existences” and “one*

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<sup>184</sup> SM, 225.

<sup>185</sup> SM, 200.

<sup>186</sup> SM, 228.

identity,”<sup>187</sup> a “consciousness” of “fragments,”<sup>188</sup> “probable selves” and incarnations in this world and “other dimensions,”<sup>189</sup> and hence a “multidimensional personality” (instead of the disorder of a multiple personality)—then Jane would be by no means content to accept this without understanding it in the most profound way she deemed possible. “There was a lot I didn’t understand,” she said in retrospect, “so I hoped to develop my abilities and learn more. But I thought that the Seth sessions themselves would more or less remain the same. Looking back now at the earlier material, I can see that I should have known better.”<sup>190</sup>

Her desire initiated a series of experiences that would later appear to be the prelude to Seth’s further elaboration of this notion of “multidimensional personality.” It was now April 1968, and Jane was ensconced one night in the rocking chair she had come to favor for the closed sessions she had continued with Rob, who was now seated, as was usual, on the couch before her. When Seth came through, it was at a volume even louder than was typical for him, and Jane felt a surge of energy sweep through her that almost dragged her off with it. Stressing emphatically each word of his dictation and gazing uncannily at Rob through Jane’s widening pupils, Seth announced that he would give a precise indication of the direction the trio’s work together would take in the coming years. Jane, he said, has in a corner of herself a “*psychological and psychic warp*” allowing her to access currents of thought that usually only are with great difficulty, and that gives her a range of reach into these far beyond that of even similarly gifted people.<sup>191</sup> So that the transmissions she receives through this window can remain as undistorted as they have, and so that they can then form the basis for the future reinterpretation of the real that they would together, he claimed, be crucial in initiating, Seth recommended to Rob that Jane avoid reading books of any conventional religious nature, since these might cause her to construe his communications in syntactical and conceptual garb more limiting than those that already constrained them. Moreover, he suddenly said in the plural, “*We will make an effort in the future to give you both some direct experience in concepts. These experiments will run along with, and closely follow, the vocalized expression of the concepts involved.*”<sup>192</sup>

“They will give you,” he continued at a quickening pace, “some small glimmering of the unfortunate but necessary loss of meaning that occurs when any concept must be communicated in physical terms. This will be a different kind of in-depth learning, a rather unique and original development that will be as devoid as possible of stereotyped symbols, which are almost automatically superimposed on such experiences.”<sup>193</sup>

When Seth next boomed, “I am the Seth that I say I am, but I am also something more,” Jane felt that she had indeed drifted into a deep end that threatened to wash her under. “The Seth personality that is part of me,” she continued for him, “is the portion that can most clearly communicate with you. Do you follow me?”<sup>194</sup>

Shortly after Rob replied in the affirmative, Seth announced that Jane had “reached somewhat beyond the personality by which I usually make myself known,” and then surprised him by asking that he end the session early by following his usual habit of drawing

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<sup>187</sup> SM, 149.

<sup>188</sup> SM, 212.

<sup>189</sup> SM, 228.

<sup>190</sup> SM, 221.

<sup>191</sup> SM, 223.

<sup>192</sup> SM, 222-223.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> SM, 223.

Jane out of what had become her ever-deeper trances by calling her name three times.<sup>195</sup> But Jane didn't respond to his many attempts . . .

So he touched my shoulder and I jumped rather violently. This interrupted the trance state. I didn't know what was going on either. *The powerful energy kept flowing through me. If I stood up I felt as if I'd go flying through the wall, propelled by this force.* My head felt huge, as if my ears were out several feet. The last sensation wasn't new . . . But trying to contain it was something else.

I shook my head. *"Wow. If I ever had any doubts . . . whatever's going on, it's not coming from me, not from my own personality"* Later in my own notes, I wrote, *" . . . tremendous energy kept flowing through me, with the definite certainty—thank God—that this was coming from beyond me, and was automatically translated into words at my end.* I feel this is as significant a development—almost—as the original Seth session. *The sense of contact was undeniably there. The feeling I had was that I really was in touch with some all-encompassing reality.*"<sup>196</sup>

In the next session, which Jane entered with some unease, whatever had spoken again took over, dispensing with Seth's customarily deep, masculine voice in favor of one quiet, lilting, and completely neuter, and clarified the previous week's unexpected events. These were possibilities latent within Jane, it said, since her first mystical experience, that could have occurred on the many occasions when the intense force she felt while channeling had built to such a height that Seth's volume taxed her vocal chords. What they had together attained the other night, the voice said, filling her again with the same tremendous swells of energy she had felt then, was Seth himself, but another Seth: "You could call me a future Seth, Seth in a 'higher state of development' " the voice said, while adding the proviso that this was merely another analogy, since this new Seth and the other exist simultaneously, despite being somehow independent of each other.<sup>197</sup> Yet the old Seth is nonetheless also a fragment of him, the only of the host of his other selves to have existed in material form, and who therefore can serve as a mediator between himself and Jane. The familiar Seth willingly translates the ideas this Seth wishes to communicate to them, the latter said, emphasizing the importance of minimizing the great distortion that usually occurs in such transmissions or revelations. What this new Seth had taught them through the other Seth is far from eternal, holy writ, but is an attempt to convey with words an inner reality, a process inevitably compromised by the same kind of loss of meaning that is entailed in describing colors to the blind. This is why, he said, I will help *"both of you achieve experiences that will fill out the words for you . . . and give you a feel for the concepts whenever possible."*<sup>198</sup>

The cone still hovering overhead, she then voiced responses to her husband's questions about who this other Seth exactly was. "I have told you who we are," it whispered. "We are Seth, and whenever we have spoken we have been known as Seth. The entity had its beginning before the emergence of your time. It was instrumental, with many other entities, in the early formation of energy into physical form. We are not alone in this endeavor, for

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<sup>195</sup> SM, 224.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> SM, 226.

<sup>198</sup> SM, 225.

through your centuries other entities like us have also appeared and spoken.”<sup>199</sup> This Seth, the discourse continued, comprises “multitudinous selves with their own identities,” which have together instructed human beings for ages, even teaching them to speak during some archaic time “before the tongue knew syllables.”<sup>200</sup> But their work occurs not only on the Earth and in the consciousness of its inhabitants: “We have seeded ourselves through endless universes,” it said, while remaining identical and continuous with the beings it becomes (through a “changing of face and form”) within these other worlds.<sup>201</sup> As for him,

physically you would find me a mass smaller than a brown nut, for my energy is so highly concentrated. It exists in *intensified mass . . . perhaps like one infinite cell existing in endless dimensions at once and reaching out from its own reality to all others.*

Yet in such a small mass, *these intensities contain memories and experiences electromagnetically coiled one within the other through which I can travel—even as I can travel through other selves that I have known and which are a portion of my identity, and yet which are so beautifully unpredetermined, for you do not exist as completed personalities within my memory, but **you grow within my memory.***

You grow through my memory as a tree grows through space, *and my memory changes as you change.* My memory of you includes your probable selves, and all of these coordinates exist simultaneously in a point that takes up no space.<sup>202</sup>

Another power surge coursed through her, and Jane’s consciousness shot up the invisible pyramid as this other Seth told Rob that men and women are like children at play, who think their games an ultimate endeavor. “But physical life is not the rule”—“identity and consciousness existed,” it strained at the limits of Jane’s brain and the grammar of her language to say, “long before your earth was formed,” and it generated many other kinds of realities.<sup>203</sup> “It is only because your own viewpoint is presently so limited that it seems to you that physical reality is the rule and mode of existence.”<sup>204</sup> Seth indicated that he, or they (for he had become a plurality), protect and nourish these physical systems so that they might grow and flourish in whatever way they will. But his task with Jane, he said, was to encourage her to explore what lies outside the apparent bounds of her world—at which she felt herself to be bodiless, and suspended in some blank void. Such exploration is necessary, he continued, if humans are to grow up and put aside the toy blocks constituting almost the entirety of their existence, and which blunt and deaden their awareness of the vast realities that encompasses them and continues infinitely in every direction. Someday, when you have brought to your awareness this multifarious reality, he continued, “You will all look down into the physical system like giants peering through the small windows at the other now in your position, and smile. But will you not want to stay, nor crawl through the small enclosures.”<sup>205</sup> And with that, Jane, though she was unaware of what the other Seth was

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<sup>199</sup> SM, 228.

<sup>200</sup> SM, 228-229.

<sup>201</sup> SM, 229.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> SM, 230.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> SM, 231.

saying, screamed, her body shaking, for somewhere she was seeing a giant gazing down into the room...

The next moment my own body, the room and everything in it began to grow to tremendous size. *My body became massive. I could feel the organs inside me grow.* At the same time, all the furniture—everything—got larger and larger. *It seemed as if the room now was huge enough to cover all of the city.* Yet everything expanded in proportion, retaining its usual shape. *I didn't feel as if this was happening. To me, it was happening . . .*<sup>206</sup>

Moments later, now out of the trance and back to her normal size (“it took Rob some time to get me out”), she sat shamefaced at not having continued what she could see had been another breakthrough experience.<sup>207</sup> And so after a brief pause, she went back into the trance, and the high, distant voice explained what had happened. Jane had transmigrated, as she does when channeling, from her own system to his, and then back—but this time, consciously. “When we make contact,” the other Seth said, “her consciousness and personality in concentrated form make a journey—in your terms, like a speck in space—the *consciousness reduced to its essence.* And from his experience we let him fall back into the physical system. The children’s blocks then become massive by contrast . . . *this was an experience in concepts.*”<sup>208</sup>

While he spoke, Jane found herself back within that experience, but this time it seemed that the room and everything in it was growing small. Everything seemed microscopic, even desolate, as she moved away from it and back up the pyramid that was narrowing above her into an apex, through which she saw again the gigantic figure gazing down into the world. As fear swept through her again, she grasped for a thread that she could bind herself back together with, for she had been so dispersed into what was happening that there was, she latter said, no ‘I’ to experience it anymore. But somehow, in the midst of it all, she found herself finding her voice, which cried out, making everything stop. She was back, the world would not shrink, and she had discovered how to put a stop to whatever might completely dissipate her . . .

“WHO OR WHAT IS SETH?” “WHO OR WHAT ARE WE...?”

This series of ecstasies proved as decisive for Jane as she claimed. Not because the new Seth replaced the old, who continued, right up to her death, to crystallize week after week, never once ceding his apparent role as the director of Jane’s increasingly mystical drama, even if he sometimes stepped aside so that the other Seth, whom the couple soon came to call “Seth II” (and whose appearances became less violent), could have its say. Something else was at stake in these experiences, which was the real itself, including a feature of its background so diffuse and receded that even diligent scrutiny rarely turns it up. The person—its subjectivity and self-consciousness—were even more in question than before, now that Seth himself seemed to be much more or even less than he once had, and since this was only apparent because Jane had passed so far outside herself that there was all at once seeing and seen fused together, and no distinct seer or scene—and yet she came to and back

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<sup>206</sup> *SM*, 232.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*



from it, could then speak of the expanse of self words allowed her to declare she had briefly been. The particulars of this ecstasy seem to radiate *The Seth Material's* final chapter—"Personal Evaluations: Who or What Is Seth?"—since the question asked there mutated before she could answer it, turning from a query having a delineable answer into an interrogation requiring a full sequence of speculation to be addressed. She again ruled out psychology's ability to speak to it, but only after articulating a remarkable course of thought that went far beyond the problem apparently on the table.

No, she says there, rebuking "psychology," "I don't believe Seth is a part of my subconscious . . . or a secondary personality," although he does apparently have an independent existence—he is felt viscerally by others, to whom "he relates much better than I do" as a teacher, and thus also as some kind of person.<sup>209</sup> Yet at the same time, psychological testing could never disclose his existence, which would have to exceed "my own personality structure as I know it."<sup>210</sup> But Seth nevertheless cannot be a ghost or spirit, since if his reality is alien enough to be invisible to science, then what of him appears here must be a "psychological personification" to some extent immanent to the world, and thus inappropriate for characterizing what is beyond it. "As to who or what Seth is," she continues, "I do think we have a supraconscious" ("that is as far 'above' the normal self as the subconscious is 'below' it") and "it may be that Seth is the psychological personification of the supraconscious extension of my normal self."<sup>211</sup> Yet what could that mean? "And if this is the case, how independent would he then be?"<sup>212</sup> Perhaps Seth's own claims, she remarks, are "as close to the answer as anyone can get," and she then includes them: I myself, he states, so exceed your schemas of intelligibility that "[i]t would be relatively impossible for me to make my full reality clear to you," and so I send myself as a "vitalized telegram"—not a transmission composed of words, but of "portions of myself"—to Jane, who then becomes my message itself (one "in which, if you'll forgive the phrase, the medium is the message") through forming a "psychological bridge" between herself and me.<sup>213</sup> Yet none of this means, she adds, "that Seth is *just* a psychological structure," for although "I agree with Seth here" that "some kind of blending must take place between his personality and mine . . . I do think that Seth is part of another entity . . ."<sup>214</sup> Yet however fascinating (and rational) this dialectical back-and-forth, in which each set of terms expressing her sense that Seth somehow exists independently of her and then the world are shown to be insufficient by means of others that are themselves then rejected, it simply presupposes and specifies a conclusion that had already been reached through a more astonishing train of thought.

While she says here that she trusts that Seth's characterizations of his reality are "honest statements about a very complicated psychological connection," her acceptance of them is hardly a matter of belief, whether of the religious or scientific variety. For some pages before this attempt to think Seth himself, she first addresses what has become for her the real problem—consciousness, and self itself—from an angle then absolutely her own. "We identify with our bodies, as indeed the psychologists tell us that we must," she writes, "but this identification is based upon the idea that without the body there is no self," and "it

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<sup>209</sup> *SM*, 269.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *SM*, 279.

also supposes that all knowledge comes to us through the physical senses,” assumptions that entail, of course, the impossibility of perception and consciousness occurring outside or without the body.<sup>215</sup> “Yet I really believe”—against what she calls the orthodoxy of science—“that the facts are clear to anyone . . . bold enough to do his own experimentation into the nature of consciousness”: “we are, to some extent, free of our physical bodies,” “we can see and feel and learn while our consciousness is separated from” them, and thus “we have access to information that does not come through the physical senses.”<sup>216</sup> Six years of trances and Seth, the year of experiments with Rob and Instream, all the letters in which her readers recounted their psychic experiences, and now her most recent ecstasies give her the right, she is saying, to postulate against science other basic facts about the self. Facts, however, that she will not deploy in support of religion, which despite professing against science “that man’s identity is independent of physical matter,” receives from her a less favorable assessment than the latter for refusing to “take advantage of that independence now” (“it is suspiciously uninterested . . . in communication between the quick and the ‘dead’”) or entertain the morphed notion of the psyche this entails.<sup>217</sup>

Since neither religion nor science could provide adequate means for illuminating her ecstasies and their consequences, she could only conceptualize them by wresting away from religion and its injunction to passivity its affirmation of experiences of the soul, burgling from science both the intellect and the chronic discomfort with the purportedly true that it induces in its practitioners, and concatenating them together into a unique method for answering the questions before her. “In a way, I was just as bad,” she says, as all those who had written her to confess that they had hidden their psychic, visionary, and mystical experiences from spouses and family out of shame and fear, for “I questioned myself and my experience” instead of forgetting the old, mechanical physics science ascribes to the real, and accepting the data contradicting it that had come to her apart from her five senses; “if I had not been affected by such ideas, I could have accepted my initial psychic experiences . . . instead, particularly at the beginning, I was as much as appalled as delighted with each new development.”<sup>218</sup> “But at least,” she continues, “*I didn’t let outdated concepts define what portions of my experience I could accept as real, and what portions I could reject.*”<sup>219</sup> In other words, while reason had once cornered her into thinking her ecstasies unreal and signs of madness, it was now the means by which she could understand them without subtracting out what in them went beyond what she believed religion to say. She could arrive at the thoughts and pose the questions they demanded.

In the case of the self, she says, her ecstasies have taught her that

We are multidimensional personalities now—you and I and everyone else. I think that *consciousness congregates, just as atoms and molecules do*; that *there are clumps of consciousness, just as there are clumps of matter*; and that *we are part of these clumps*, whether we know it or not.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> SM, 267.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> SM, 268.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> SM, 268.

It wasn't the conclusion to her reasoning so much as a conceptualization enabled by it: The years in which some alterity beside myself has displaced and spoken past me, intermixed with and sometimes dissolved me, have made it apparent to me that sentience continues beyond the materiality in which it is only temporarily anchored and encased, and that what it reaches is not some destination apart from itself, but a larger, paradoxical identity of which it is a facet or part. We are molecules in cells, cells in organs, selves in a self. Continually experiencing something that suggested this led her to accept and rewrite in this way Seth's ideas about the "multidimensionality" or multiplicity of psyche, which she thus already presumed when attempting to determine who or what he was.

And while what she accepted was the existence, immateriality, and immortality of the soul, this was scarcely for her, to repeat it once more, a matter of faith in either God or thinly-veiled humanist pieties. It was knowledge, and of a strange kind. Neither simply the apparently immediate gnosis received in her trances and ecstasies, nor only the discourse uttered during and about them, it was a fusion of both: mystical vision, and intellectual, conceptual language stretched to account for it. But it was also open, unstable, even volatile—the outcome of questions and experiments, the provocation for more of each, and thus the seeds of what might end up being its destruction and subsequent transformation. The psyche must, she says, be the clustering of distinct but interfused selves she feels herself to be when Seth is speaking of it, but understanding this, she adds, will require more of this strange mode of inquiry.

We know little about our own psychology, and even less about the nature of consciousness. To learn more, we must be willing to examine our own consciousness, individually. In doing so, I'm convinced that we will discover a greater individuality and sense of identity . . . *My own work is such an investigation.* I consider my psychic experiences, the Seth sessions, and my entire relationship with Seth as *a learning adventure—a continuing one* . . . the *theories* expand the meaning of individuality and challenge us to accept the larger self that both science and religion at various times have taught us to deny.<sup>221</sup>

Failing to undertake the investigation, she continues, by neglecting the relevant questions—"who or what is Seth?,"<sup>222</sup> "what is a probable self?,"<sup>223</sup> and "*who or what are we?*"<sup>224</sup>—will only leave us mired in "the confines of egotistical, physically-oriented awareness" (the question offering liberation as much as does ecstasy) and thus literally foreclose "answers to our deepest questions, knowledge that can help us deal more intelligently with physical life" and the dilemmas of suffering, trauma, violence, death, decision, and regeneration it incessantly raises.<sup>225</sup>

"WHAT OF TIME?," "THE FUTURE?," "CAUSE AND EFFECT?," AND "OUR DEEPEST QUESTIONS..."?

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<sup>221</sup> SM, 268.

<sup>222</sup> SM, 264.

<sup>223</sup> SM, 195.

<sup>224</sup> SM, 205.

<sup>225</sup> SM, 268.

“So the Seth Material does not ignore deeper questions,” she writes soon after. “I really think that it can hold its own with the best metaphysical writing of the time.”<sup>226</sup> Whether or not she is also referring with the term to pop theology or spiritual esoterica, she undoubtedly means by it something like philosophical or conceptual thought. Jane’s first ecstasy undoubtedly functioned like a conversion experience, initiating her into a mode of thought that allowed her to understand existential problems in a fashion quintessentially religious: the story of a life, the events it comprises, and the death in which they culminate, as has been seen, could now for her be read not just in themselves but also in the record of the psyche’s incarnations, the desires that led to them, and the theodicy this implies. “More and more I have seen how reincarnation makes sense out of apparently senseless tragedies, and provides an inner structure to situations that would otherwise seem chaotic and unjust.”<sup>227</sup> But that first mystical breakthrough nonetheless also set off the long course of experimentation and writing through which she sought to better understand and specify this “psychic life,” and that had led to her most recent ecstasies and the swerve they fed back into her thinking. So although she had hit upon a quasi-religious framework for contending with existential questions, she would not allow even “limited concepts” to determine how she conceived them: “*Why should we take it for granted that such concepts are right...*?”<sup>228</sup>

The extent of her commitment to turning this intellectual ethos to existential questions is apparent in what she then wrote about life and death. Even as she was discussing with clients the crises death had wrought for them (the parents of a recently deceased three-year old, for instance, are told by Seth that their child passed on “so that they would be forced to ask questions” about the project of their own lives), Jane could not at all accept that contending with them would require, as theology was still saying, realizing one’s finitude and thus dependence on the absolute (i.e., because this would disclose a proper course of action). She lucidly confronted the problem using the very words in which it was then formulated by acknowledging, at the very beginning of “Who or What is Seth?” that “human beings . . . live suspended between life and death,” “a condition of existence . . . that we share with the animals.”<sup>229</sup> “But animals,” she adds, “do not anticipate their own death, or wonder about their status before birth.”<sup>230</sup> Yet the apparent fact, she continues, that death is the only completely inevitable possibility offered a person perhaps does not ultimately define human existence, for if, as Seth had said, “past, present, and future are artificial devices, divisions superimposed over a spacious moment in which all action is simultaneous,” then death might not call to us from the future, reorder our past, and enable us to act authentically from the present.<sup>231</sup> “Suppose we saw beyond the point of death, discovering to our own surprise that we were still conscious—not only of ourselves as we ‘were,’ but of other portions of ourselves of which we had been unaware?”<sup>232</sup>

The future? Perhaps it consists of events already in existence in this spacious moment; events that we have conveniently decided not to contend with ‘as yet.’

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<sup>226</sup> SM, 238.

<sup>227</sup> SM, 133.

<sup>228</sup> SM, 267.

<sup>229</sup> SM, 265.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> SM, 266.

[The past?] We focus our attention on a certain group of events—the ‘present’ ones—and then drop them into the subconscious where they seem to fall away and become distant. *If we could keep our attention on these past events and still concentrate on the present ones simultaneously, then our sense of present time would be immeasurably enlarged.*<sup>233</sup>

“Existence” would in that case raise strange, heretofore unencountered questions, from multiple temporal directions and even other of its dimensions, and what would receive these would need to be a self having a nonfinite structure.

Hearing existence’s call, however, will at the same time first require altering even profound, “authentic” understandings of time so that they accommodate the simultaneity of events: if “everything exists in the universe at one time,” the text reads, the psyche’s “separate existences exist simultaneously” as well.<sup>234</sup> “But what about,” she continues, “cause and effect, then?”<sup>235</sup> “Since all events occur at once,” she recounts Seth responding, “there is little to be gained by saying a past event causes a present one. Past experience does *not* cause present experience. You are forming past, present, and future—simultaneously.”<sup>236</sup> The story of a life would therefore be the story of how it writes other stories while also being written by these (whatever the apparent order they all follow), and discerning the meaning of one’s “own” would require understanding how it is thus part of a longer, unfinished story cutting through others. Death might cap this one, but other events in it might initiate or resume part of another life. So that an event’s import is never legible only in relation to the present life’s end.<sup>237</sup>

Arriving at such an understanding of time and life, Seth again reminds her, also at the same time necessitates direct, supraintellectual experience of it: “I do not harp to you about theory simply because I want to spout theory, but because I want you to put these ideas into practice.”<sup>238</sup> “There are,” he elaborates, “inner senses as well as physical ones” that “you must learn to recognize, use, and develop” through, “first of all, ceasing identification with your ego.”<sup>239</sup> Chief among these is a faculty—“psychological time”—allowing the nonsequential, but still somehow temporal, connections between events to be mentally perceived. “Pretend that you hold a flashlight,” he explains about its use, “and the flashlight is consciousness... All you have to do is swing the flashlight in other directions” by quieting the mind and looking inward.<sup>240</sup> “But if we momentarily put aside the ego... won’t we be unconscious,”<sup>241</sup> occluded, even annihilated, by the awareness transcending the world and its time would open? “There is no need,” he answers, “to feel that when you block out the ordinary conscious mind, there is only blankness. It is true that when you close one conscious mind—door—there may be a moment of disorientation before you open another. But *there are other doors... you have other conscious selves... you have more than one conscious mind*”—*there is not one ultimate, transcendent consciousness or presence to reach and be absorbed in*—even “if you

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<sup>233</sup> SM, 290.

<sup>234</sup> SM, 148-149. “As far as we know,” Jane notes, “this reconciliation of reincarnation and simultaneous time is original with Seth. Most other theories take the time sequence for granted.”

<sup>235</sup> SM, 149.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> “Some people’s lives seem to make no sense, for instance, unless you know their ‘previous’ ones. Our fifty- or sixty- or seventy-year lifespans are like self-contained novels, well-plotted and executed.” SM, 152.

<sup>238</sup> SM, 225.

<sup>239</sup> SM, 252.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> SM, 252.

are not used to manipulating these other conscious portions of yourself.”<sup>242</sup> Moving through the other time, moreover, is a more horizontal than vertical journey, and even ends up breaking the compasses that tacitly orient travel on mystical or visionary paths.

“Psychological time is... an easy route of access from the inner world to the other, and back again” since it enables one “to feel apart from time” (which will then seem “dreamlike”) and thus sense the side of events that exists outside its flows, while at the same it will expand and “add duration . . . to normal time” afterward.<sup>243</sup>

“But this material,” Seth warns, returning again to the issue of concepts, “is not for those who would deceive themselves with pretty, packaged, ribboned truths that are parceled out and cut apart so you can digest them . . . *our material demands that you intuitively and intellectually expand.*”<sup>244</sup> The other selves, modes of consciousness, and psyche revealed by the inner “senses” are even said by him to be “*as critical, “even as intellectual . . . as the consciousness with which you are ordinarily familiar*” so that there is neither excuse nor justification for abandoning reason when encountering them (they comprise, even, a “*conceptual sense*”).<sup>245</sup> What is instead required is to conceive how the other experience and order of events normally concealed by language, the senses, and time is continuous with the world all of the latter generate and are articulated together in, and thus to grasp how invisible, transcendental aspects of the psyche constitute experience, which in turn somehow translates them. Shifting into high speculative gear, Jane asks in this regard whether we are, for instance, “biologically unable” to experience past and future as immediately we do the present, or whether instead

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<sup>242</sup> *SM*, 252-253. Because it comes from someone who may indeed be a great mystical or visionary writer, this suggestion that mystical, spiritual degrees or levels of consciousness can and even ought to be *manipulated* by the person attempting to attain them is worth an essay in itself.

<sup>243</sup> Entering psychological time will also awaken, Jane says, other inner faculties that allow the world’s insides to be perceived, and its exteriors transmogrified. Not only do the pasts and futures of persons and things start to enter directly perception (which then becomes “psychic,” in the mundane sense), but the individual begins to experience immediately and quite viscerally what these others experience; without losing completely his identity, he both feels “the experience of *being* anything . . . within his field of notice: people, insects, blades of grass,” and also can achieve “direct and instantaneous cognition of the essence” of any such being by way of an “intimate becoming” whereby there is, temporarily, “transformation of the self into it.” In Jane-Seth’s elaboration of their vision, exiting everyday time somehow enables the distance between the individual and other beings to be lessened, and the difference between them transformed; the self-experience and constituent structure of these others is felt in virtual immediacy, their insides emanating out like rays or “vibrations” that are directly received by the individual (“much like empathy,” Seth says, “but more vital”), who then becomes almost identical with their sender. Another being or individual, “Seth and Jane” say together, is constantly made out of the transmissions an identity receives psychically from others, and can be experienced if consciousness’ threshold of perception is pushed inward and below so that some part of these inner “sensations” begins coursing in. If this happens, they say, the waking self becomes aware of its “identity” and continuity with this fluctuating, unstable individual, and can forget its body and then expand or contract quite radically its awareness (to become somehow, as in Jane’s ecstasies, gigantic or miniature), and even temporarily extricate itself from phenomenality, sometimes fragmenting and reassembling itself in the process. With all this, Jane claims, comes heightened inspiration and extrasensory perception, followed by lucid dreaming and travel outside the body. See *SM*, 251-263.

<sup>244</sup> *SM*, 252.

<sup>245</sup> *SM*, 253. As to the “conceptual sense,” it permits “direct cognition of a concept in much more than intellectual terms... Concepts have what we will call electrical and chemical composition [as thoughts do]. The molecules and ions of the consciousness change into [those of] the concept, which is then directly experienced. You cannot truly understand or appreciate anything unless you can become that thing... With practice and to a limited degree, you will find that you can ‘become’ the idea. You will be inside it, looking out—not looking in.” *SM*, 257; Jane’s brackets.

“we have psychological blind spots as defense mechanisms to prevent our being overwhelmed by reality as it actually is?”<sup>246</sup> While “our nervous systems allow us to only perceive so much,” she suspects that some “psychological element” is the primary condition of the blockage.<sup>247</sup> Seth, however, sees the brain as the most profound source of the disparity between inner and outer reality, for when information from the former is received and cognized by the individual, it must be translated by neurological structures that inevitably alter and often distort it. In the case of time and events, neural signals and “pulses leap the nerve ends” in what cannot, because of the spatial intervals involved, be “a simultaneous procedure,” and “a lapse between each perceived experience,” and thus also the line of time, results.<sup>248</sup> Such order is nonetheless far from inevitable for consciousness as such. “There is no such lapse in many other personality structures,” he reiterates: “*Events are simultaneously perceived. Reactions are also nearly instantaneous in your terms. Growth and challenge are provided not in terms of achievement or development in time, but instead in terms of “intensities,” or “events in all their ramifications and probabilities.”*”<sup>249</sup> So even though a “physical neurological structure” must instead separate events from each other and arrange them in linear sequence, their real simultaneity means that past and future only “exist as a series of electromagnetic connections held in the brain and in the nonphysical mind” and are for that reason not “objective or independent from the perceiver...

*The connections, therefore, can be changed, and such changes are far from uncommon. They happen spontaneously on a subconscious basis. The past is seldom what you remember it to be, for you have already rearranged it from the instant of any given [“present”] event. The past is constantly being recreated as attitudes and associates change. This is an actual creation, not a symbolic one... Once more, the only reality that can be assigned to the past is that granted to the symbols, associations, and images that exist electromagnetically within the brain.*<sup>250</sup>

“Psychedelic drugs,” he adds, “alter the neurological workings, and therefore can give you a glimpse of these other realities,”<sup>251</sup> the parallel and alternate versions of one’s own life events, those belonging to other incarnations, and the fact “*the future is plastic,*”<sup>252</sup> and radically so, from not being “dependent on a concrete finished past” since “*any given event can be changed not only before and during but **after** its occurrence.*”<sup>253</sup>

Once all this speculation draws down to a resting point, Jane begins considering in its light the existential issues that first set it in motion. She entertains, while still not fully endorsing, Seth’s claim about the psychological knots of life—“difficulties arise when such alterations [of prior events] do not occur automatically” as “severe neurosis is often caused because the individual has not changed his past”<sup>254</sup>—and begins transposing some of their joint thoughts about time to the issue of living a life. “It is an oversimplification,” she states,

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<sup>246</sup> SM, 288.

<sup>247</sup> SM, 290.

<sup>248</sup> SM, 262.

<sup>249</sup> SM, 238.

<sup>250</sup> SM, 218.

<sup>251</sup> SM, 238.

<sup>252</sup> SM, 131.

<sup>253</sup> SM, 220.

<sup>254</sup> SM, 241.

“to say that all present problems are the result of past life difficulties” because if the past is neither the past nor really stable, “we are not ‘stuck’ with our problems, whether they come from this life or another. They don’t have to come along with us, and can be solved.”<sup>255</sup> The branching, intersecting vagaries of “other” lives can be understood as having led to the existential knot of one’s own, which need not for that be seen as fated to play them out or resolve them.

#### “THE GOD CONCEPT”

So right there, at the end of the first real book Jane published under her own name, the questions that had been calling out from the holes her life had punctured in the real somehow pushed her psyche into providing responses commensurate with their weight and depth. The basic problems Seth’s (and now the second Seth’s) unendingly weird presence had forced her to ask—“*who speaks?*,” and “*who or what are we?*”—were being treated, though, using one of the only sorts of terms or words likely to yield an answer. “*Theory*,” “*intellectual and critical thought*,” “*speculation*,” and, especially, “*concepts*” were proving as crucial to formulating the answers as the “direct experience” that might be expected to be privileged by a mystic (a title she would later explicitly claim for herself) but that was already for her inseparable—as “*a direct experience of concepts*” or “*conceptual sense*”—from thought. In spite, then, of the fact an often barely assimilable experience stood at the very heart of her writing and life and despite her proximity to existential dilemmas of suffering, it would always be concepts, the itineraries of thought leading to them, and the questions asked along the way that would allow her to speak to them, since her own doubled together, split-into-one psyche suggested that most of the relevant beliefs or ideas would have to be almost completely revised. So the *psyche*, *time*, *events*, *particles*, *biological life*, and even *God* would all eventually be drawn into her psychic warp before being pulled back through transformed, question on question on question proliferating along the way.

“Seth has promised,” she closed the essay, “to write his own book, dictated during sessions, in which he will answer some of these questions: ‘In my book, *I will show the personality from the inside out, so to speak* . . . To some extent it will relate my own experiences, but I hope it will give a picture of the nature of reality as seen by someone who is not imprisoned within the three-dimensional system.’”<sup>256</sup> But in parallel with “his” literary effort, she hazarded her own answers, by employing her mystical-intellectual method in a sequence that will become familiar. Faced with a question raised by Seth’s discourse or her own perplexity at some incongruity in the real, the initial, enigmatic answer of a vision or ecstasy would come charging out from her psyche (sometimes tearing through her), to be followed by a blast of words and concepts sucked into the vacuum that trailed behind it; from these would come clarification, specification, apparent closure, until something else that failed to stay together in them began rearing up its head. This process, which went on for sixteen years, began with these initial questions about the self, the psyche, and time, and kept moving, taking up others that were bound together with it, and upending into disarray half what it established before arranging it all back into another order or form.

More such questions were gathering at the horizon, although from so far off that they were hardly in view. The problem of the neurological and psychic conditions of

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<sup>255</sup> *SM*, 152.

<sup>256</sup> *SM*, 272.



ordinary experience still loomed in the picture, but another issue would soon predominate and alter the view.

“Creatures without the compartment of the ego,” Seth kept reiterating, “can easily follow their own identity beyond any change of form.” “Trees,” he told her by way of example, “have their own consciousness. The consciousness of a tree is not as specifically focused as your own, yet to all intents and purposes, [it] is conscious of fifty years before its existence, and fifty years hence. Its identity spontaneously goes beyond the change of its own form” since “it has no ego to cut identification short.”<sup>257</sup> “The complicated human personality with its physical structure,” he elsewhere continued, “has evolved, along with some other structures, a highly differentiated ‘I’ consciousness, whose very nature is such that it attempts to preserve the apparent boundaries of identity.”<sup>258</sup> Incapable, for that reason, of seeing itself as what it is apparently not, the consciousness of the ‘I’ screens out the frequent instances in which something other than itself is at work in and as itself, and thus remains a long distance from the experience of displacement and multiplicity that is already the psyche’s.

So whatever the exact conditions of this ‘I’ consciousness might turn out to be, the more pressing matter, Jane saw, was indeed to learn how to rid oneself of its unitary perspective and attain one more plural and polycentric. Seth’s own indications here were as yet vague, although he had alluded, in his discussion of the psyche as a multitrack recorder, to how transforming consciousness was precisely analogous to enabling the stereophonic setting of the latter (which “enables one to mix and combine harmoniously the elements of the various channels”<sup>259</sup>) such that one’s other selves or incarnations begin to “know their unity,” and “their various realities merge in the overall perceptions of the whole self.”<sup>260</sup>

Despite the sessions during which Seth would confirm her thinking having not yet occurred, Jane was quick to grasp the consequences. “If, as Seth maintains,” she asked, “we have probable selves [and] live various existences, what happens to the concept of the single soul?”<sup>261</sup> On the face of it, the question seemed only to address whether the psyche could anymore be rightly considered a unity if it never, in essence, subsumed or transcended its many parts. There would have to be, she thought, another way of conceiving it if it was, all at once, an apparently endless host of selves and their “probable” variations. Much more, however, was at stake in her question, and it concerned the ontological structure implicit in Seth’s description of the transformation of consciousness, and its practical implications for the ‘I.’ Since the psyche incarnates into selves that forget an identity they must later remember, ran part of her thinking, doesn’t the psyche just turn out to be a unity that is only fractured and multiple from the perspective of its instantiations? Wouldn’t remembering and returning to it simply result in the dissipation of an identity that would simply prove, then, to have been illusory? Seth himself, she was thinking, had taken to characterizing both the psyche and the more encompassing reality of which it was itself a mere part in terms that mirrored her experience of the overhead cone: “God,” he avowed, “is a primary pyramid gestalt” that is always “unfolding and enfolding,” or emanating out from itself and returning back, and the psyche a phase and level of the process.<sup>262</sup> The image was an old (neo-)

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<sup>257</sup> *SM*, 259.

<sup>258</sup> *SM*, 129.

<sup>259</sup> *SM*, 200.

<sup>260</sup> *SM*, 201.

<sup>261</sup> *SM*, 200.

<sup>262</sup> *SM*, 244.

Platonic one—the pinnacle of the hierarchy was even, he would say, “nonbeing”<sup>263</sup>—and Jane felt the consequences. “Granted we survive death,” she asked, “what part of us survives? As Seth gave [us] more material on reincarnation and the inner self, we naturally wondered. Having a whole self may be great, but if my Jane Roberts self is engulfed by it after death, then to me that’s not much of a survival. It’s like saying that the little fish survives when it’s eaten by a bigger one because it becomes part of it.”<sup>264</sup> Although her terms were far from refined, they bespoke the profound problem of whether the ‘I,’ the psyche, and whatever might lie beyond it are each instantiations of a level of being above and more primary than themselves, and thus destined for annihilation or absorption by their essences upon finding their way back to them. The primacy of multiplicity suggested by the psyche’s many incarnations and countless versions of these notwithstanding, there could still be, at bottom, a sole divine origin from which everything springs, and to which it all eventually goes as it progressively sheds the forms encasing it and dissolves back into its ultimate essence, the ‘I’ the first casualty of the ascent.

Seth was almost immediate in furnishing a response. While still sometimes casting as its telos the I’s need to transcend itself for a consciousness closer to the psyche’s, he began elaborating a picture of the structure of being quite different than the pyramidal hierarchy that so disturbed Jane. “Most of your ‘God concepts’ deal with a static God,” he started, “and here is one of your main theological difficulties. *The awareness and experience of this gestalt constantly changes and grows. There is no static God. When you say ‘This is God,’ then God is already something else.*”<sup>265</sup> Though indirect, the claim was evidently aimed at disabusing Jane of the idea that being was only or ultimately organized according to a pyramidal form. “God” was also other to this structure, and might even have to be if it indeed nowhere stood outside the changes it wrought.

This new thought continued and built to a pitch as Seth spun together an allegorical account of divine manifestation that would further divert God from his (onto-) theological status. Once he was finished, absorption back into the divine would no longer seem inevitable or even possible to Jane, since even God was about to be denied the capacity to recover and draw back together the things into which he had issued. “All of this sounds complicated,” he said “but only because we must deal with words. I hope that intuitively you will be able to understand it.”<sup>266</sup>

“The purpose is, quite simply,” he explained of divine self-manifestation, “being as opposed to nonbeing... Now—and this will seem like a contradiction in terms—*there is nonbeing*. It is a state, not of nothingness, but *a state in which probabilities and possibilities are known and anticipated, but blocked from expression*. Dimly, through what you would call history, hardly remembered, there was such a state. *It was a state of agony in which the powers of creativity and existence were known, but the ways to produce them were not known.*”<sup>267</sup>

“This is the lesson that All That Is had to learn” he said, employing the phrase he preferred over God, “and that could not be taught. This is the *agony* from which creativity originally was drawn... The agony itself served as an *impetus*, strong enough *so that All That Is initiated within itself the means to be.*”<sup>268</sup> Already reckoned as neither omniscient nor self-

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<sup>263</sup> SM, 240.

<sup>264</sup> SM, 212.

<sup>265</sup> SM, 244.

<sup>266</sup> SM, 240.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> SM, 240-241.

sufficient nor incapable of feeling something analogous to the pain of this, the other traditional divine characteristics the story was initially attributing to God—ontological primacy, the prefiguration in itself of all possibility, complete (self-) knowledge of these—would also soon be withdrawn from it, and replaced by others. An inner push and then desire to produce from out of itself were the first of these...

*The first state of agonized search for expression may have represented the birth throes of All That Is as we know It. Pretend, then, that you possessed within yourself the knowledge of all the world's masterpieces in sculpture and art, and that they pulsed as realities within you, but that you had no physical apparatus, no knowledge of how to achieve them, that there was neither rock nor pigment nor source of any of these, and you ached with the yearning to produce them. This, on an infinitesimally small scale, will perhaps give you... some idea of the agony and impetus that was felt.*

*Desire, wish, and expectation... are the basis for all realities. Within All That Is, therefore, the wish, desire, and expectation of creativity existed before all other actuality. The strength and vitality of these expectations then became in your terms so insupportable that All That Is was driven to find the means to produce them.*<sup>269</sup>

... with distinct possibilities and their initial (because still incomplete) differentiation from “God” coming next...

At first, in your terms, all of probable reality existed as nebulous dreams within the consciousness of All That Is. Later, the unspecific nature of these ‘dreams’ grew more particular and vivid. *The dreams became recognizable one from the other until they drew the conscious notice of All That Is.*<sup>270</sup>

... until they become further distinguished and endowed with the beginnings of consciousness, desire, imagination, and a burning will for autonomy...

And with curiosity and yearning, All That Is paid more attention to Its own dreams... It then purposely gave them more and more detail, and yearned toward this diversity and grew to love that which was not yet separate from itself. *It gave consciousness and imagination to personalities while they were still but within Its dreams. They also yearned to be actual.* Potential individuals, in your terms, had consciousness before the beginning or any beginning as you know it, then. *They clamored to be released into actuality,* and All That Is, in unspeakable sympathy, sought within Itself for the means.<sup>271</sup>

... which God, finally, so struggled to honor that it was brought close to madness (“had it not solved [this “primary dilemma”], All That Is would have faced insanity, and there would

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<sup>269</sup> SM, 241-242.

<sup>270</sup> SM, 242.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

have been, literally... a universe run wild”<sup>272</sup>) before discovering or perhaps even inventing the solution of granting them actuality and an existence outside and distinct from itself, and then undergoing the radical self-loss required for that:

The means, then, came to It. *It must release the creatures and probabilities from its dream. To do so would give them actuality.* However, *it also meant ‘losing’ a portion of its own consciousness,* for it was within that portion that they were held in bondage. *All That Is had to let go.* While It thought of these individuals as its creations, it held them as part of Itself and refused them actuality. *To let them go was to ‘lose’ that part of Itself that had created them.* [Already It could scarcely keep up with myriad probabilities that began to emerge from each separate consciousness. With love and longing *It let go that portion of Itself,* and they were free. *The energy exploded in a flash of creation. All That Is, therefore, ‘lost’ a portion of Itself in that creative endeavor.*<sup>273</sup>

Abhorring the memory of its self-enclosure and solitude more than the constant pain that would seem implied by its fragmentation, God literally enjoys witnessing the autonomy of its realizations and even their repetition of this apparently originary actualization...

All That Is loves all that is has created down to the least, for It realizes the dearness and uniqueness of each consciousness which has been wrested from such a state and at such a price. *It is... joyful at each development taken by each consciousness, for this is an added triumph against that first state, and It revels and takes joy in the slightest creative act of each of Its issues.*<sup>274</sup>

... and is nowhere said to beckon them back to itself.

“All individuals,” Seth concluded, “remember their source, and now dream of All That Is as All That Is once dreamed of them.” And yet, he added, that is not all they do. God being neither static nor transcendent in relation to them—“there is a portion of All That Is... residing within each consciousness”<sup>275</sup>—they themselves “*yearn to set It free and give it actuality through their own creations.*”<sup>276</sup> Their own desires—to create themselves and things apart from themselves—repeat, because they simply are, this originary desire, whose further actualizations are not only not contrary to this God but impelled onward by it.

The response to Jane’s questions was taking shape. God is indeed, as she had perceived, somehow at the source of every psyche, and realizes itself as all of them. Despite this, however, its status as ultimate origin is rendered uncertain to the extent that it would have indeed gone unfulfilled or mad from not yielding to the splitting off from itself of itself, and because what it gave of itself would, in that case, have had to be given, and the gifted beings would of necessity be something outside itself that it afterward depends or relies on (and whose generation it thus desired). This (self-) demotion of the origin could even said to be irreparable, since Seth nowhere accounts for the possibility of its restoration from its division and suggests, instead, that its desires persist at heading in the opposite direction.

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<sup>272</sup> SM, 243.

<sup>273</sup> SM, 243.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> SM, 245.

<sup>276</sup> SM, 244.

So God, then, is no God or no longer one—its loss of itself keeping it from oneness or nonbeing—unless it is a God immanent in all things as well as in their desires to bring something else forth from themselves; the psyche is thus not subsidiary or subordinate to it; and the ‘I,’ even, not the bottom rung on the ontological ladder. Losing oneself to another consciousness might not be the violent inevitability Jane felt it to be, but a change in the expanse of God on the part of a part of God, the further realization of an unleashed desire.

But how God could (be) change if it nonetheless was at first pure, predetermined possibility? Even if the questions, again, were not yet entirely explicit in Jane’s mind, they had congealed enough together to provoke an answer...

THE PSYCHE, “A STATE OF FLUX” THAT “IS AND MUST FOREVER BE CHANGING”

*The account of divine manifestation and kenosis we just saw verged on being explicit conceptual thought without quite arriving there. This is not to say that concepts, defined again as thoughts so profound that any terms used to restate or specify them in turn end up rethought, are elaborated only by thinkers and writers of the highest intellectual powers; Schreber has concepts, not just Freud. But taking up Jane’s text here and simply reading it—drawing out its meanings and claims and then relating these to questions and texts they imply or are tied to—would not necessarily yield a profound conceptual content. Inventive “ideas” and perspectives would emerge, to be sure, but not thoughts comprehensive enough to stand the test of being read theoretically or philosophically.*

*Conceptual thought in this sense first appears at the moment of Jane’s work examined in this chapter. The first of Jane’s several books containing only dictations “from Seth”—Seth Speaks—includes, toward its beginning, an account of the psyche or soul. What is remarkable about this discussion is that Jane-as-Seth scrupulously avoids ascribing eternity, being-qua-stasis, and ideality (in a general Platonic sense) to the soul and its “spiritual” realm and instead characterizes them in terms of becoming, change, speed, and a need to undergo actualization. Outside (perhaps) some currents of Buddhism, popular and theological expressions of the major world religions do not to my knowledge attribute these characteristics to the divine or spiritual realm, and it is certainly the case that this does not happen in any remotely orthodox current of the monotheisms. (A quasi-philosophical thinker like Jacob Boehme marks an exception, as his own conception of the divine has it so actualized that it cannot be said to stand outside process and change; but it is difficult to conceive of him as being anything but heterodox.) Given that Jane’s writing parts ways with such a basic, ancient metaphysical concept, it would be difficult to say that she is without significance for thinking questions of religion outside the forms and conceptual schemes of the metaphysical tradition. But is her work indeed consistent and profound enough to function effectively as thought? Do its “propositions” about the real hold up when read philosophically, and do they thus indeed hold consequences for theory and philosophy?*

*These questions have to be addressed if the claims in the introduction about the conceptual status of Jane’s thinking are to be justified. And answering them requires testing Jane’s thought to determine, first, whether it is sufficiently coherent to bear on far more comprehensive and precise (i.e., philosophical) thought and, second, whether traditional metaphysical hierarchies covertly govern it such that it holds no consequences for the latter. The reading of Jane’s work undertaken in this chapter amounts to such a test. After showing that Jane-as-Seth conceives in precise terms the soul as an inner, divine self in a way reminiscent of ancient Gnosticism (and thus metaphysics), the chapter shows that she nonetheless also describes the soul in terms that invert traditional Platonic metaphysical hierarchies (becoming is made prior to being, plurality to unity, and so on). Once this has been done, the possibility that the soul remains the origin and telos of its actualizations in Jane’s work is considered. This is because if Jane were indeed to grant the soul such a status (so that becoming would be the origin of actuality), then she would simply be engaged in what Heidegger called a metaphysical inversion and not a more radical refusal of conceptual hierarchies. The claim of this chapter is that she succeeds in engaging in such a deconstruction, no matter how strange its form.*

*The reading undertaken in this chapter, it should be said, is not entirely based on Jane’s own questions about or understanding of “Seth.” This does not make it illegitimate (the basic interpretability she can be seen according the real here not only opens her to but calls for free interpretation), but reading her-as-Seth without her own thinking in view means that the links between her concepts and her experimentation cannot be kept in the foreground when those links are in fact the very thing that provide a clear sense of Jane’s problematics—these are otherwise not always evident when she speaks as “Seth.” (Chapter four offers a fuller account of how her questions arise from her experiments and then result in precise concepts, which in turns*

*allows for a reading of her in relation to specific philosophical texts.) What we lose of Jane here, however, is more than made up for by the quasi-philosophical and speculative picture of “Seth” that emerges in this chapter. However weird in form, the thinking she produces as Seth withstands, surprisingly enough, the sort of critical and interpretive scrutiny that would expose its complicity with familiar metaphysical structures of thought. Moreover, her thought is instead shown here to contain a novel and radical understanding of the relation between spirit and matter and thus to point to the possibilities for intellectual invention offered by anthropologies of concepts. (Reading Jane this way in fact suggested to me that a different mode of anthropological interpretation is possible.)*

Jane herself was still asking this question (the one we closed the last chapter with) when Seth began dictating his promised book. With hardly a year-and-a-half separating her from her “experience in concepts” and the publication of *The Seth Material* still months away, she hadn’t yet decided on what else apart from the declarations at the end of that text she could consider firm in her new knowledge. And so she still met with skepticism the prospect that Seth could effectively author an entire book: however brilliant this other, she doubted that he could conjure the organization, self-scrutiny, and authorial voice the three she herself had written required. Yet the paradox of such doubts was that they could now scarcely find a place to lay down roots outside her intellect, which had itself become so plastic that it accommodated them as much as it did her visions and Seth’s discourse, making them a crucial element in the strange, fertile ecology it formed with the “psychic” side of her that conducted and grounded so much of the high wattage of her life. The real action-passion was instead there, and she steered and allowed its course, did little to inhibit either thing, and let Seth do his. Which meant that whatever her worries about his book, the nerves and “stage fright” he observed her to be feeling the night he began dictating were hardly blocking the way.<sup>277</sup>

As always, Rob was with her, transcribing each of Seth’s words, which were now being spoken at a far slower and deliberate pace than usual so that they would read as much as possible like the written word they would now be. But everything else that was usually in place when the un-place took place remained. In his annotation for that session’s transcriptions, he notes how Jane’s pupils remained characteristically open when she entered the trance that night, the speed with which she did so, the sheer volume and intensity of her trance voice, the foreign intonations (Russian, Irish, German, Dutch, Italian, and French) often ascribed to its accent, divergences from her own mannerisms—pointedly angular gestures, and “a rearrangement of her facial muscles” (“a tautness resulting, I believe, from an infusion... of consciousness”)—and the palpable reality of the personality with whom he dialogues. “Her transformation into Seth . . . is absorbing to watch and participate in,” read the notes.<sup>278</sup> “Regardless of degree, Seth is uniquely [...] present. I am listening to, and exchanging dialogue with, another personality.”<sup>279</sup>

A personality that didn’t fail to live up to his rep for reality by kicking things off with a series of rhetorical moves that make for what looks like a deliberate, even well-calculated strategy. Start out, on the very first line, with a joke, in order to soften them with laughter—“Now: You have heard of ghost hunters. I can quite literally be called a ghost writer”—then drive into the space thereby opened up and explain your peculiar existence: “*yet I do no approve*

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<sup>277</sup> SS, 3.

<sup>278</sup> SS, 3.

<sup>279</sup> SS, 3.

of the term *'ghost'* . . . [*nor*] *spirit either*, and yet if your definition of that word implies the idea of a personality without a physical body, then I would have to agree that the description fits me."<sup>280</sup> And since they're probably still resisting your weirdness, appeal to their manners. "I address an unseen audience. However, I know that my readers exist, and therefore I shall ask each of them [...] to grant me the same privilege."<sup>281</sup> Well okay, er . . . "Seth," a few of them might say in response, but what're you after? And then give them a blow you think they won't forget: "While my readers may suppose that they are physical creatures, bound within physical bodies, imprisoned within bones, flesh and skin," and while "you"—now switch to the direct address—may "believe that your existence is dependent upon this corporeal image" and thus "feel in danger of physical extinction ("for no physical form lasts, and no body, however beautiful in youth, retains the same vigor and enchantment in old age" and "if you identify with your own youth, or beauty, or intellect, or accomplishments, then there is the constant gnawing knowledge that these attributes can and will vanish") (ouch, "Seth")—while you, dear reader may think all this, "I am writing this book to assure you that this is not the case."<sup>282</sup> "Basically you are no more a physical being than I am, and I have donned and discarded more bodies than I care to tell."<sup>283</sup> Not bad, at least for those who can believe in this sort of thing: forget death and the misery of your own finite existence, let me assure you that all that's an illusion hiding something much better that I've got for you! And now, in order to keep hold of the credulous whom have hung with you this far and are actually still listening, immediately switch back to the previous topic of your dubious existence via a non sequiter, and then drive home the double sell: "Personalities who do not exist do not write books. I am quite independent of a physical image, and so are you."<sup>284</sup> Not bad for the first few paragraphs, and the parallelisms that turn up toward their end keep getting worked in those that follow: "If you believe firmly that your consciousness is locked up in your skull and is powerless to escape it . . . then you sell yourself short, and you will think that I am a delusion. I am no more a delusion than you are."<sup>285</sup> And in fact, dear reader, don't worry about whether I'm really just a hoax worked from behind some hidden curtain, since it's only your own ignorance that leads you to pose that question. "You would be much better off reading this book if you asked yourself who you are, rather than asked who I am, for you cannot understand who I am unless you understand the nature of personality and the characteristics of consciousness."<sup>286</sup>

A decent show of rhetoric. . . But why mention that? Whether or not it was calculated in the way just suggested is mostly immaterial, since the mere possibility that it could have been demonstrates that Jane's Seth personality (whatever it might have been) was quite capable of coning or lying to an interlocutor or reader, and thus deserves to be treated as the person that Robert Butts said it was. Which in turn means that the equally sophisticated discourse that follows in the book's three hundred pages is not, at bottom, characteristic of psychosis. Unlike the latter type, Seth's is ascribable to an agent, is addressed to another person, possesses most of the other traits typically attributed to illocution, and instead ought to be regarded as existing well on this side of the intelligibility.

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<sup>280</sup> *SS*, 3.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> *SS*, 4.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> *SS*, 5.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*



But there is another reason to show that the text (regardless of anyone's intentions) traffics in rhetoric, which is that doing so foregrounds what could easily be regarded or construed as its banal dimensions, those that treat popular religious and esoteric themes—survival, reincarnation, magic, and so on—in a manner quite characteristic of the *doxa* of the United States, and that would hardly, then, seem to earn for it the title of thinking; a risky gesture, no doubt, for what else will likely be seen in passages like those above but a huckster's or naïf's attempt to convince the credulous of “facts” that, if true, could never be facts, and a stream of discourse that could at best be classified as religious, but neither theological nor apophantic? Yet the cost of concealing these supposed trivialities would be much higher, for the interested, canny reader that wonders at some of the more audacious claims made here about Roberts and then turns to one or two of her books would cry foul upon discovering that they sometimes fail to sustain the brilliance usually showcased here. But worse, to deny their seemingly stupid side would be to skirt the issues most at stake in them: The possibility that thinking takes place in unlikely and supposedly low quarters (but what exactly are Jane's?) and, moreover, that the anxiety, bemusement, and disdain provoked by their sometimes overly American and supernaturalist nature indexes a problem. So deferring discussions about exactly when, if ever, Jane and Seth get stupid (or instead just play dumb), whatever might be ridiculous, trivially “religious,” or just plain unintelligible about the text will be treated in what follows as neither its essence nor accidental form but as just as primary and derived as everything remarkable in it—the “honest move,” of course, but one that will leave the suspicious reader with much to reckon with after many of the latter dimensions of Jane and Seth's thought have been made evident. “Dimensions” Seth wastes no time in getting to . . .

“KNOW THYSELF MEANS MUCH MORE THAN PEOPLE EVER SUPPOSE...”<sup>287</sup>

While the sell doesn't exactly subside in the next pages, it is rapidly overshadowed and subsumed by an address far less susceptible to easy denigration. After either securing or merely arguing for his authority to speak (“if a writer can qualify as any kind of authority on the basis of age, then I should get a medal”<sup>288</sup>), a claim is made about the knowledge this entails. “[A]s such, I am aware of some truths that many of you seem to have forgotten” and of which “I hope to remind you,” a statement of intent that is followed by an indication that whatever is indeed speaking is reactivating a past that will demand more attention for this discourse than it would have been thought necessary to give:

I do not speak so much to the part of you that you think of as yourself as to *the part of you that do not know, that you have to some extent denied and to some extent forgotten*. That part of you reads this book, even as “you” read it.<sup>289</sup>

Nothing new here in Seth's reference to another self or psyche, or in his equating it with the ‘I’ that denies it. But what is significant is the fact he claims to address this very soul and not the ‘I’ that has forgotten its identity with it and seems cognizant of its own reading of the text: this already shows that far from being a conception constructed from scratch to

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<sup>287</sup> SS, 92.

<sup>288</sup> SS, 5.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

account for Jane's experiences, this other soul or psyche has a long history that is reactivated here, whether wittingly or not. (But who, again, would be aware of doing this?) For Seth repeatedly calls the individual to recollect its identity with the soul—the *self that you know is but one fragment of your inner identity*,<sup>290</sup> and “*the personality is multidimensional, even though people hide their heads [. . .] in the sands of three-dimensional existence and pretend there is nothing more*,<sup>291</sup> so that “*you are in as deep a trance as the woman is through whom I write this book . . . but little by little you must wake up*,” with “*my purpose being to open your inner eyes*”<sup>292</sup>—and in so doing, he takes up the very old Western themes of self-knowledge and self-recognition. Not, however, in the technical senses they carry in Plato (which pertains much more to intellectual thought than visionary self-apprehension) but in the way they are to some extent redeployed by ancient Gnosticism. Repeated here is a key tenet of both Gnosticism and the Platonic cultural milieu it grew within (which is also taken up for centuries by medieval heresies, Renaissance philosophies and reason's esoteric underground): one is neither who one thinks one is nor of this false world of the senses but is, instead, a fragment of God who has forgotten itself and who can save and return to itself by hearing an inner voice that shouts out this truth and then remembering that it is oneself.<sup>293</sup> Not only is the reader further interpellated as the psyche and called to remember that he is not, then, entirely of the sensible, temporal world (“you are not stuck in time like a fly in a bottle, whose wings are therefore useless. You cannot trust your physical senses to give you a true picture of reality. They are lovely liars, with such a fantastic tale to tell that you believe it without question”<sup>294</sup>); he is also explicitly characterized as a being that is really of godlike knowledge and power. “*There are no limitations to the self. There are no limitations to its potentials*.”<sup>295</sup> Which are? To create and to know: “You create,” first of all, “the world you know” and “project your thoughts outward into physical form . . . creat[ing] both the glories and terrors that exist within your earthly experience,” including “the physical body,” and when generating from thought this body, you do so “at a deeply unconscious level” and “with great discrimination, miraculous clarity, and ultimate unconscious knowledge of each minute cell that composes it.”<sup>296</sup> But this “*seemingly unconscious*,” other you is “*far more knowledgeable*” than you and “conscious, aware, alert”:

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<sup>290</sup> *SS*, 11.

<sup>291</sup> *SS*, 12.

<sup>292</sup> *SS*, 28.

<sup>293</sup> The soteriology of the various currents of ancient Gnosticism all hinge on the individual's capacity to hear and respond to a redeemer figure's call to recollect its spiritual (*pneumatic*) nature as a sleeping fragment of the divine. In one school—called “Sethian”—the redeemer is even known as “Seth.” “The word ‘gnosis’ itself,” as Kurt Rudolph writes, “has, as we have seen, a predominantly soteriological value and in itself already clearly expresses the understanding of redemption. It is the act of self-recognition which introduces the ‘deliverance’ [...] and guarantees man salvation. For this reason the famous Delphic slogan ‘know thyself’ is popular also in Gnosis and was employed in numerous ways, especially in the Hermetic gnostic texts. Just as the Platonic school already interpreted this proverb in the sense of knowledge of the divine soul in man, so here it was understood to mean a knowledge of the divine spirit (*nous*) which forms the true nature of man, his divine nature” See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1987), 113. Hereafter cited as *GNH*.

<sup>294</sup> *SS*, 5.

<sup>295</sup> *SS*, 12.

<sup>296</sup> *SS*, 8-9. In counterposing the true, “unknown” God to the false God or demiurge responsible for the existence of the world, Gnosticism obviously did not ascribe to the former the traits of omniscience and omnipotence that Christian eventually did. The similarity between Roberts' discourse and Gnostic motifs is nonetheless striking and worth evaluating in terms of its implication for her effectively metaphysical questioning.

[I]t correlates information that is perceived not through the physical senses, but through other inner channels. It is the inner perceiver of reality that exists beyond the three-dimensional. It carries within it the memory of your past existences. It looks into subjective dimensions that are literally infinite, and from these subjective dimensions all realities flow. All necessary information is given to you through these inner channels and unbelievable inner activities take place before you can so much lift a finger, flicker an eyelid, or read this sentence upon the page. This portion of your identity is quite natively clairvoyant and telepathic, so that you are warned of disasters before they occur, whether or not you consciously accept the message, and all communications take place before long before a word is spoken.<sup>297</sup>

But the transcendental communications from this other self go unheard because *you* “do not listen to its voice” and “do not understand that it is the great psychological strength from which your physically oriented self springs.”<sup>298</sup>

On the face of it, comparing Seth with the Gnostics looks to be an unwarranted, seemingly unmotivated gesture, and no sure ticket to making a case for the importance of the questions raised by his and Jane’s thought. Although much more will suggest that Seth uncannily repeats throughout his work this element of both Gnosticism and its descendants, such as his invocation of virtually the same Delphic imperative they used to call the self to remember itself—“the words ‘know thyself’ mean much more than most people ever suppose”<sup>299</sup>—or the fact that his name is the same as that of the saving figure that for a current of Gnosticism (called “Sethian”) issues this call, his divergence from them seems to cancel out the comparison. Already absent here are the latter’s dualistic cosmology (according to which the world is the irremediably evil creation of the false God of the Demiurge), almost the entirety of its soteriological apparatus (which often provides instructions for escaping the cosmos upon death by deceiving the demonic Archons that rule and guard its outer circles), its apocalyptic obsessions, and its anthropology—for which, in fact, the divine element in man is not the *psyche* or soul, but his intelligible dimension, or *nous*.<sup>300</sup> But even if Seth’s call to the self to know itself as a god could somehow be linked substantively to antiquity by way of direct historical transmission or typological comparison, Jane’s cultural-historical terrain seems so absolutely different from that epoch’s as to make such broad, sweeping gestures seem almost useless: More networked, sci-fi quantum computer than ineffable God, Jane-Seth’s psyche seems so characteristic of an age overdetermined by the natural sciences, machine technology, and materialism as to be only distantly relatable to anachronisms like Gnostic cosmologies and Platonic hypostases. And if Seth’s words require comparison, they ought to be first stacked up next to other discourses that employ the same threadbare Western master-trope that they do: the self that knows and achieves itself by hearing its own voice, a.k.a. the self-present subject.

But there’s the rub, and the very problem that Seth presented to Jane and now does to us: Not only do his, her other psyche’s voice confound all the rules of metaphysical discourse they are supposed to obey and exemplify, but they also talk up a storm that

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<sup>297</sup> *JS*, 8-9.

<sup>298</sup> *JS*, 9.

<sup>299</sup> *JS*, 92.

<sup>300</sup> See *GNH*, *passim*.

reanimates long-lost metaphysical ideas, sucks them with an updraft into an atmosphere thick with their technological future antithesis, and then discharges all the built-up, polarized force in a fusion of both—"the multidimensional personality." Tracking that weather will require attending to both the conditions in the sky and the elements on the ground. Unconvinced? Then check it out . . .

"ALL REALITY... IS IN A STATE OF BECOMING"<sup>301</sup>

Always a thorough lecturer, "Seth" had already taken pains in the pair of sessions in which most of the book's first chapter was delivered to prevent his readers from forming misconceptions about the nature of his own pedagogical endeavor. Right after calling to them like God or a prophet, he makes himself out to be a much more humble and even milquetoast character, a onetime resident of a world from which he has been so long absent as to have become a foreigner who can now return only with passport in hand, and who is met with "inconveniences of entry" and "problems of translation" upon arrival.<sup>302</sup> Foremost amongst them is the local dialect: the "slow affair" of language and the "linear thought pattern" that results from its grammar, which are together "the end product of your physical time sequences" and thus inherently poor means of grasping the "simultaneous events" of his current country of origin.<sup>303</sup> So *caveat lector*: Even though, he says, "the concepts" impressed upon Jane's psyche during Seth's forays here are often received without "the verbal knowledge" she makes available for his use adding much static to his signals, "distortions" do occur, even if they seldom result in totally jammed or failed transmissions.<sup>304</sup> Which isn't to say that Seth is fiery *pneuma* landing atop a mountain or in an upper room either, to inspire in Jane immediately holy, divine speech: *Nothing he says is pure or "neutral," since "all knowledge or information bears the stamp of the personality who holds it or passes it on."*<sup>305</sup>

Having cleared up that he had already rewritten and twisted the knowledge that the borrowed voice broadcasting it for him would distort a bit more, he wanted to get back to calling to his readers, this time by conveying something about his own nonphysical existence. "Let it serve to remind you," Rob recorded his wife saying for and as the voice, "to remind you that your own basic identity is an nonphysical as my own."<sup>306</sup> While Seth paused before beginning the speech that he declared would commence chapter two, Jane yawned; not because she'd gotten over her anxiety about playing ghostwriter for Seth, but because she'd been way under ("really out," Rob would add when the session ended—"she knew only that Seth had talked about emotion"<sup>307</sup>). Which wasn't really what he delivered when he unwound his next pitch, a curve ball with so much backspin that it soon looked liked it'd quickly go out of [the zone], even if it came off quite straight at the start and continued that way for a bit. "My environment, now, is not the one in which you will find yourself after death. I cannot help speaking humorously, but you must die many times before you enter this particular plane of existence

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<sup>301</sup> SS, 53.

<sup>302</sup> SS, 10.

<sup>303</sup> SS, 14.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> SS, 15.

<sup>307</sup> SS, 20.

First of all, you must understand that no objective reality exists but that which is created by consciousness. Consciousness always creates form, and not the other way around. So my environment is a reality of existence created by myself and others like me, and it represents the manifestation of our development.<sup>308</sup>

And when Seth declares that he and his “colleagues” thus “form whatever particular images we want to surround us,” the ball still looks like a cinch to hit back, but then comes that sudden, unanticipated swerve: “We do not use permanent structures . . .”<sup>309</sup> “in my environment, you would be highly disoriented, for it would seem to you as if it lacked coherence . . .”<sup>310</sup> “I assume whatever shape I please, and it may vary, and does, with the nature of my thoughts . . .”<sup>311</sup> “we can also take several forms at one time, so to speak. . .”<sup>312</sup> and “our environment [...] is composed of *exquisite imbalances, where change is allowed full play* . . .”<sup>313</sup> If this still looks like an easy hit, then it’s either speeding at you like so much crazy talk, or you think such oddballs gets tossed out all the time—and either way your swing will miss. But think back quickly to all the fastballs thrown out early on, and you just might connect with what’s about to come spinning across the plate.

Right from the onset of her breakthrough vision, Jane keeps getting swept up and into that ostensibly ultimate reality known for so long as the transcendent, the suprasensible, the divine, the realm of ideas—what Nietzsche simply called, in a famous paragraph that still effectively characterizes an entire epoch of thought, “the true world”—while Seth continually characterizes what she sees with the slew of oppositions that traditionally define and keep apart this supreme beyond and its derived and junior double, the secondary, copied, and degraded “world of appearances.”<sup>314</sup> Recycling and amping up that rhetoric, he is already again declaring here that “the physical senses usually blind you” with the “camouflage” “illusion” of physical reality, behind and inside of which lies “a greater reality” that is “eternal” and without “any time framework,” which of course makes it look like he’s the merely quaint rerun of a program so anachronistic that half the West stopped following it more than four centuries back, when Christianity got down with the innerworldly ethic of Protestant faith, detonating thereby charges previously implanted in the two-world framework and imploding it from within. Yet connecting these prior flashes of an antique cosmological syntax to the keywords of the pitch on its way perhaps makes the latter’s surprise trajectory at least visible, so that when you look down at the ball spinning wildly under your nose before you strike out, the words emblazoned upon it—“*becoming*,” “*multidimensionality*,” “*open system*”—rotate by at slot-machine speed, taunting and dizzying you with each turn.

The insertion of those words right into the center of a work on the soul might have been anticipatable, but that would have required having hung out on some of the unbeaten

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<sup>308</sup> SS, 17.

<sup>309</sup> SS, 16.

<sup>310</sup> SS, 17.

<sup>311</sup> SS, 18.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> SS, 22.

<sup>314</sup> I am referring obliquely to Heidegger’s famous discussion of Nietzsche’s account of the two worlds of metaphysics and the overturning of Platonism in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche Vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 200-210.

paths that cross Seth's own, and even then, the boiling of the strange brew worked up by his feat of linguistickery wouldn't have been something to lay any bets on. For after "Jane" walks to the kitchen to get a light for "Seth's" smoke, the latter starts working a heavy-duty rhetorical-syntactical—perhaps even metaphysical—inversion. Although one could construe as trite his description of his universe as a heavenly domain of gods-at-play where each creates with his thoughts an infinity of self-appearances and environments, the metaphors used to account for it really does amount to a shock, one that might even carry with it the force to astonish: Jane's semi-god declares himself to be on speed, or at least racing along at a high rate of it, pressing onward as he becomes—or simply *is* becoming while not *being* far closer than anything in the world of sense to the permanence and stability once attributed to being. Coursing along instead, like the relentless artificial information-machines with which he-as-Jane can't help but compare himself, Seth & Co.'s most passing thought results in both their environment and themselves taking on appearances that express and correspond to them: not only do "I take on whatever shape I please," but "I can have it night or day, in your terms . . . or any period say, of your history,"<sup>315</sup> and "our environment therefore is composed of exquisite imbalances, where change is allowed full play."<sup>316</sup> And since they are always dealing in this way from the endless deck of forms whose simultaneous fabrication is half the game played, Seth and company "realize that *permanency of form is an illusion, since all consciousness must be in a state of change.*"<sup>317</sup> As he more definitively puts it, *consciousness is always "a state of becoming,"*<sup>318</sup> and the soul, "*a state of flux*"<sup>319</sup> that "*is and must forever be changing*"<sup>320</sup> and not anything "*static*"<sup>321</sup> or "*fixed.*"<sup>322</sup>

The already high weirdness of an apparently small-time medium working a metaphysical upset that involves souls and gods that be by becoming, from the other side of the forms that they make and break in the process . . . this strangeness only gets doubled when Seth assembles together out of some classic, two-worlds syntactical debris a remarkably consistent description of a plural universe that is only ever on the move. The construction work begins when he next makes some claims about the continuity between his readers' world and his own: "My environment, as I told you, changes quite constantly, but then so does your own. *You rationalize away quite legitimate [...] perceptions at such times.*"<sup>323</sup> When a room, for instance, seems small and cramped, it really has taken on those qualities, its "psychological impact . . . altered."<sup>324</sup> The same applies to that most proximate of objects, "your closest environment," the body.<sup>325</sup> "*You are constantly,*" he continues, "*changing the form, the shape, the contour, and the meaning of your physical body*"—your "atoms and molecules constantly die and are replaced," your "hormones are in a constant state of motion and alteration," and "electromagnetic properties of skin and cell constantly *leap and change, and even reverse themselves.*"<sup>326</sup> And yet, Seth tries to drive you home, "*you accept and perceive and focus upon*

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<sup>315</sup> SS, 18.

<sup>316</sup> SS, 22.

<sup>317</sup> SS, 42.

<sup>318</sup> SS, 71.

<sup>319</sup> SS, 70.

<sup>320</sup> SS, 71.

<sup>321</sup> SS, 76.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> SS, 22.

<sup>324</sup> SS, 22.

<sup>325</sup> SS, 40.

<sup>326</sup> SS, 43.

*continuities and similarities as you perceive physical objects of any kind, and in a very important manner you shut out and ignore dissimilarities out of a given field of actuality.*"<sup>327</sup>

Therefore you are highly discriminating, accepting certain qualities and ignoring others. Your bodies not only completely change every seven years, for example. *They change constantly with each breath... If you perceived the constant change within your body with as much persistence as you attend to its seemingly permanent nature, then you would be amazed that you ever considered the body as one more or less constant, more or less cohesive entity.* Even subjectively you focus upon and *indeed manufacture the idea of a stable, permanent conscious self.* You stress those ideas and thoughts and attitudes that you recall from 'past' experience as your own, completely ignoring those that were once 'characteristic' and now are vanished—*ignoring the fact that you cannot hold thought.* The thought of a moment before, in your terms, vanishes away. *You try to maintain a constant, relatively permanent physical and subjective self in order to maintain a relatively constant, relatively permanent environment. So you are always in a position of ignoring such change.* Those that you refuse to acknowledge are precisely those that would give you a much better understanding of *the true nature of reality, individual subjectivity, and the physical environment* that seems to surround you.<sup>328</sup>

A basic, fundamental understanding of the real that the descriptive synonymy—"becoming," "flux," "change," "alteration," "variation"—Seth constantly applies to it is meant to provoke: "All That Is," "God," "Being," is always an "infinite becoming."<sup>329</sup>

Rarely a slouch when it comes to reasoning or miming it, Seth even furnishes the beginning of an explanation for why the ego constantly mistakes the incessant variation of experience for the temporal persistence of itself and the objects arrayed before it, thereby misrecognizing that everything really travels at a speed as terrible as that of the soul's flux (and that your reality simply slows to a snail's crawl). Physical existence, he says, is based on the "root assumptions" or collective beliefs that govern the mind's hallucinatory manufacture of experience, the most fundamental of which are about the basic reality of space and time, the existence of an objective world outside the self and knowable only via sense-data, and the apparently brute fact of the body. These cause the ego, Seth says, "to interpret experience in a very limited but intense range."<sup>330</sup> "The universe," for instance, "appears to be composed of galaxies, stars, and planets at a various distances from you. Basically, however, this is an illusion . . . *The universe as you know it is your interpretation of events as they intrude upon your three-dimensional reality. The events are mental.*"<sup>331</sup> But they are constantly "interpreted" by means of space and time, and especially the latter, which is said to be the principle at the crux of these physical misreads: "Your own time structure misleads you into your ideas of the relative permanency of physical matter," but "*stated simply, time is [not] a series of moments*" and is instead a field of divergent but simultaneous events.<sup>332</sup> But filtered through the common understanding of time as a linear sequence of now's—which is starting to

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<sup>327</sup> SS, 43.

<sup>328</sup> SS, 43.

<sup>329</sup> SS, 300.

<sup>330</sup> SS, 36.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

sound quite vulgar, with Seth even proffering that it is the motor of the “leveling down”<sup>333</sup> of experience—the psyche’s events come to occupy a discrete segment of time, and are translated into objective phenomena; and from there, from a perspective of locatedness, the ego projects back onto the real (or being) its root assumptions, arriving thereby at the ideas of a God that does not become, and a soul that arrests itself in attempting to approximate its maker.

But right behind that obstruction, the psyche keeps on changing, all the time; or, better it keeps rolling along outside time, or according to some other ordering or organization of the real radically different from time (even if it admits of analogies). “Our work, development, and experience,” he says, returning to one of his older concepts, “all take place within what I term *the ‘moment point.’*”<sup>334</sup> “Within the moment point,” he explains, “the smallest thought is brought to fruition, the slightest possibility explored, the probabilities thoroughly examined, the least or the most forceful feeling entertained. It is difficult to explain this clearly, but the moment point is the framework within which we have our psychological experience. Within it, *simultaneous actions follow ‘freely’ through associative patterns.*”<sup>335</sup> All the attempts to describe what a barely or a-temporal instance in which eternity becomes would be start to become hard to follow, since Seth just ends up acknowledging the near-impossibility of speaking of such a thing, and shies away from addressing all the logical issues involved. But while he (or the Jane that might be lurking somewhere in the recesses of the trance, demanding more consistency from him) continues to insistently attribute both eternity and becoming to the psyche, he at least begins to account for the obvious problems entailed by joining or equating the two terms and ascribing them to the soul. Beings like us can give “full reign” to change, he says, because “we are motivated by an inner stability that can well afford spontaneity and creation,” even though “*it takes study, development, and experience before an identity can learn to hold its own stability in the face of such constant stimuli*” (“*many of us have gotten lost, even forgetting who we were until we once more awakened to ourselves*”).<sup>336</sup> Not bad, since this betrays both some awareness that claiming repeatedly that becoming is the basic character of the real strongly implies that it is far more stable and permanent—perhaps essential—than anything else attributed to the latter, and a corresponding realization that a consciousness that could grasp hold (by letting go) of all the discontinuities and singular differences of this reality would require some kind of identity that would all at once, at the very same time, see the transient, instantaneous appearances of a thing in time as both discontinuous entities and one continuous thing. An identity, therefore, that would recognize itself as being at the same time both the same thing as all the other, discrete versions of itself, and different from all of them; and that would even thus know itself from both sides of its own deaths, whether those that occur from moment to moment or “absolute,” physical death. Neither kind of death—neither the demise of an existence, nor the snuffing out by time’s passage of the ‘I’ spoken or thought in an instant—would function here as an individual being’s limit or impossibility, since without time, nothing can reach its end: “*Everything happens at once*” for the psyche, “*and yet there is no beginning and end . . . so it is not completed in your terms at any moment.*”<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> SS, 48.

<sup>334</sup> SS, 20-21.

<sup>335</sup> SS, 21.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> SS, 300.



(TIME OUT: SWITCHING OFF CHANNEL YOU)

(Time out. It would seem that this text—the one being read right now, which is also the one Seth wrote through Jane when she spoke as him and thus through “him,” and who does so now as me while I write this, and even just did through the you bypassed and hijacked when her words were transmitted by the voice in your head become no longer your own, but the channel of a long-dead woman’s second personality—it would seem this text just jumped the guardrail, into a delirious freefall. But perhaps not for the reasons you think. Yes, an experience of madness—of absencing, desubjectivation, self-eclipse—just happened in the writing and reading of this text, and you were there not to witness the channel it opened up through the fleeting you that took stock of it all before expiring when the flow got shut off again just now. So get a hold of yourself, re-anchor, come back. And grab your critical faculties while you’re at it: Becoming, eternity, identity, and all the other words that Seth just recurrently broadcast through us are far from crazy-talk, but are instead the very philosophical, metaphysical syntax that insinuates or channels itself into anyone who tries to approach and think the real with any but the most irregular and poetic of words, Jane-Seth-me-you included. But since the consistency, high intelligence, and ambition of the discourse that just got made your own somebody else’s (don’t doubt it, it’ll be with you for some time as another, which is a veritable ontological and epistemological problem) was probably made reasonably evident in its explication (and implication of you as somebody else), then you’ve probably already conceded to me that such analysis (and all the historical, comparative, and appropriative operations that compose it) is possible, and that it therefore constitutes a task that isn’t sheer, mere madness, but one somewhere between those poles of meaningful labor and senseless non-work. Jane-as-Seth, you can likely see, is probably smart-stupid, rational-mad, here with us-completely gone, inside-way out.

(Unless, of course, Jane and Seth are just plain crazy or inchoate, unless they weren’t within metaphysics to begin with... But since all this is almost now standard, even obsolete deconstructive fair—except insofar as it’s being pushed in a direction that it doesn’t always go, which is toward the conjoining of oneself with another, but *as oneself as oneself and another* (a point that will have to wait)—doesn’t the real risk of delirium lie elsewhere, in the approach taken to Jane here, in the assumption that some kind of organization actually underlies or obtains in her texts, that these indeed obey some kind of rule? Isn’t it possible that the ostensible “psychology” whose articulation and unfolding are being charted here wasn’t at all conceived or imagined with any concern for consistency or profound questions in mind (and in whose interest would that have been?) but through a process of thought random enough that tracking its movements with the assumptions that there’s a driver somewhere steering their course (or that there’s even a course) will only get us irremediably sidetracked, in another kind of delirium worse than the one we’ve already come down with, a manic, high-pursuit chase of a chimera of a discourse that will never finally add up or come together because the nobody that conjured it up—the absent person or “no one,” or else the insignificant nobody that wrote it—never watched over its articulation like a censor, regulating it with rationality’s highest rule, the principle of non-contradiction, never for that reason cut out the offending words and passages or rewrote them so that they conformed to the order of the discourse, and never did this because she had either vacated without any conscientiousness the place of con-sciousness from which she would have done that work, or because she was simply too ignorant and dumb for it? In short, won’t following the text with the assumption that it is in some way highly reasonable, even commensurate with philosophy simply lead to the dead-end of a delusion—a delusion implanted in my head by

the Jane that has possessed me, and now threatens to intrude into you? So shouldn't you just jump ship now, before my own delusions about Jane burst, and the crash, mostly my own, really happens?

(All those are indispensable questions, different versions of which I've thus asked myself many times; so ask them. But don't forget that some threadbare intellectual prejudices probably motivate you to do so, and that they probably belong to and place you in one of two camps:

(*EITHER*, first off, among those "on-the-ground" empiricists that think, or even know—because it's common sense—that "there is no such thing as metaphysics," that the history and linguistic heritage of philosophy is not real history, or the history of real things, and that it does not at all inform or structure other discourses; or that even if it is sometimes does, it should play little role in what I *should* be doing here, which is both *not* projecting a kind of organization and reasonability onto a discourse that is probably without it, that is only "partially nested," as they say, or "inherently contradictory," as everything found in "everyday life" is said to be, and also *not* then, as I am, because I have presumptively ignored those good, sound rules of method (which just happen to be almost never explicitly formulated or intellectually defended, let alone conceptualized, since the latter feat would require concepts...), conveniently treating this discourse as if it has nothing to do with some more general discourse (the one I should be examining, because that, of course, is what a cultural anthropologist does)—either that of the hundreds of channels Jane helped spawn, or of the more general American religious discourse of which they were a part (both of which have rules embedded in their "practice"—that self-evident thing human beings always do, everywhere, and that is not at all a concept thoroughly embedded in something called philosophy or the metaphysical tradition—a "practice," at any rate, to which I should be attending, if I am to know anything of worth about Jane) so that I can now talk about what really interests me, which is philosophy, something that should belong outside the endeavor of a text like this one, especially since the concepts needed from philosophy were obtained from it a few decades ago—the "ideas" "helpful" for analysis, like "conditions of possibility" (everything has a history, they say, and thus has such non-causal conditions), "the subject" (meaning, they continue, the various forms of individual social agency present in the social life of human beings), and "discourse" (another neutral, universal aspect of "social life," I am told)—and need not always be formulated anew through some kind of engagement with the thinkers who most incisively articulated them, or examined to see if they can be so easily employed to account for the production, circulation, and transmission of discourse within other fields, those past both the inner and outer frontiers of Western intellectual discourse (which is why few anthropologists have even heard of someone named François Jullien, let alone cracked one of his books);

(*OR*, alternatively, among "the theorists" or philosophers (even as the latter continue to have their population reduced by "theoretical" and post-theoretical viruses), who are often quite sure they know what thinking is, that it is something done in dialogue with either *the* Western philosophical tradition or modern literature—that body of writerly texts that are philosophy's disavowed double but that, it is now clear, deserve to be accorded the same high, enduring status as (even studied instead of) it, as a

source of some the most enduring concepts or schemes of thought—and that has little to do with some quasi-mystic medium, since understanding how these two discourses condition and determine the thought of an epoch into a homogenous whole requires no more work than analyzing their texts but never venturing outside them, especially into discursive terrain in which it is unclear whether the old rational or metaphoric schemes are at work within it (even though the tradition of thought is agreed to have either terminated or reached a point where it is impossible to determine where it begins or ends, and even though it is considered by some to have so exhausted itself as to be in need of once again taking out a loan from its outside) so that when, under certain circumstances, exceptions are made, and outsiders are allowed a place at the table, perhaps because they are somehow “interesting” (and are then treated as quaint, but never as crucial, since that can only ever be found within the tradition or the peaks of the canon), what they might say is already understood not to be worth too much listening, so that if I start to say that this Jane deserves more than philosophy is ready to give (and if I don’t speak ironically of her life, mocking her thought and myself in the process, in order to assure all those claiming the honorific of philosophy for themselves), then my attempts to analyze her discourse are suspect from the start, and the rebukes begin (which is why philosophers rarely read a guy named François Jullien...

(And if by chance, but it’s so unlikely, you didn’t identify with either of these camps (my problem is that I belong in both of them, depending on the day) and you still wonder if I’m on crack to work the argument that I am here, then let me ask you, without presuming to diagnose you, whether your hesitation or resistance has anything to do with the fact that certain questions that have started to emerge here are difficult to ask from within European languages and the societies corresponding to them, or to accord much dignity or importance to:

(*SUCH AS*: (1) Are “my” thoughts ever those of another? That is, even if no subject prior to these thoughts enacts or generates them, don’t thoughts generally carry a trace of the other persons they concern or in whose vicinity they happen? And if so, then aren’t other people always “thinking me?” (2) And if the thoughts I think thus sometimes arrive in me from an other (from the refrain of a song, from parental or Presidential commands, from ten years ago when your boss humiliated you, from whoever wrote and translated the Bible or Torah you read as a child, or the blog that transmitted to your psyche last night), “who” thinks in me, and what happens to the me we tried to start out with? Does its claim to possess whatever is thought through it make it each time some kind of hybrid or composite being? (3) And what, then, is the self? Are we, you and me, always already other selves, self-others, selves made of oneself and other selves, but not, in the latter case, entirely? (4) And if Jane asked these questions in me through you, then what is philosophy anymore? Meaning: has it migrated into domains where it would have once been possible? Can thinking—conceptual, critical, experimental, manifestly worked-out discourse—be said to take place in the vernacular? (5) Does the difficulty in speaking these thoughts carry with it any politico-ethical consequences?

(And if my endeavor still seems dubious, I implore you to try to hear the voice of the other speaking (in) you as we proceed, since it’s the best evidence that we’ve always been

channeling each other, you and me. So clock back in, switch back on, and let the channel open again...)

#### “THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL SELF AS OPEN SYSTEM”

Granting for now that Jane and Seth evince a degree of consistency and rationality sufficient to allow us to pose such questions from under the strange luminescence of the content of their work (and not just in the more familiar light of the sociohistorical and biographical conditions of its articulation), then proceeding with rigor demands asking if what is perhaps starting to look here like an upsetting of the order and hierarchy of a syntax that has belonged both to philosophy and to discourses that are to the side of, or even improper, to it—that is, Jane’s and Seth’s joint ascription of becoming, and even speed, to the soul, the transcendental, and God—is indeed really an inversion, and a significant or profound one, or whether their simultaneous, possibly contradictory characterization of that realm of the psyche as an extra-temporal eternity that is always above and before time, death, and the sensible world instead merely keeps intact and reproduces an essential residue of Western Platonism, theology, and the popular, vernacular understanding of being that it still determines and shapes. Moreover, it is also necessary to ask—just as is done of far more precise discourses than Jane’s, whether philosophical or literary—whether such a blatant inversion of metaphysical oppositions and language is really so radical, or instead merely the reinforcement of certain quite durably sedimented ancient terms that can never as such be overcome, but only deconstructed. In short, two questions arise here: Are Jane and Seth really inverting a religious version of metaphysics’ syntax?, and if so, are they thereby challenging or merely reinscribing the larger metaphysical tradition that insinuates itself through nearly the entirety of discourse in the West? Since the second question requires, of course, addressing debates that divide contemporary philosophy and theoretical discourse, it can only be addressed as we proceed; but the first we keep at immediately.

At first, Seth’s prospects look good, since something else is completely upside down in his cosmological picture. Instead of describing the psyche as a unity transcending and at the origin of its different existences, he always employs terms that begin with multi- or connote multiplicity in order to characterize the psyche as *essentially multiple*—“*multi-focused*,” “*multidimensional*,” of “*multitudinous selves*” and “*multiple realities*”—and thus never exactly treats it as a unity underlying what would ostensibly be born from it. As the discussion of the moment point continues, Seth attempts again to explain how the psyche’s eternity involves both change and multiplicity. “For example,” he says to Rob, “Pretend that I think of you.” “In so doing,” he continues, “*I immediately experience—and fully—your past, present, and future (in your terms), and all of those strong or determining emotions and motivations that have ruled you. I can travel through those experiences with you, if I choose.*”<sup>338</sup> “We can follow a consciousness through all of its forms,” he continues, “and in your terms, in the flicker of an eye.”<sup>339</sup> This ability to sustain multiple focuses in enormous quantities in one, eternal “instant” is quickly clarified to be the psyche’s mode of perceiving through the “banks of personalities” making it up, which it “uses . . . as you use the eyes in your head.”<sup>340</sup> Each of these fragments or

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<sup>338</sup> SS, 21

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

focuses of consciousness is an organ or “attribute”<sup>341</sup> of the soul. “In my level of existence, I am simply aware of the fact, strange as it may seem, that I am not my consciousness,” but that “*consciousness is an attribute used by me.*”<sup>342</sup> The psyche even organ-izes itself by generating and multiplying these selves: “We can form from ourselves, from our own psychological entireties, other personalities whenever we wish.”<sup>343</sup> “*You may think of your soul . . . as some conscious and living, divinely inspired computer who programs its own existences and lifetimes.*”<sup>344</sup> so that it can “*learn through its own actions.*”<sup>345</sup> These other selves “must then develop according to their own merit, using the creative abilities inherent in them”<sup>346</sup> and sometimes even make “*realities that may have been undreamed of by the computer itself.*”<sup>347</sup> Such incarnation or “actualization” is even quite appropriately described as a process of “dramatization”—the cultural and historical setting and theme for a life is created by masses of souls, which then enters this play to adopt role in it, and then write and re-write as it goes the script in which it appears, even as it forgets that it is not identical with this mask or persona. But such multi-personification is also the multiplication of “spaces” and “times”: “In each play, both individually and en masse, different problems are set up,” and thus “the multidimensional self . . . creates varieties of conditions in which to operate,” each of which will enable it to learn and creatively respond to the challenges it sets itself.<sup>348</sup> The conditions, however, are not merely those of anthropological or terrestrial existence in a three-dimensional, “matter-concentrated system.”<sup>349</sup> The psyche “actually create[s] whatever dimensional effects are desired”<sup>350</sup> and then forms itself, for example, into universes of “highly integrated mathematical and musical patterns.”<sup>351</sup> “*Now these various plays,*” says Seth about all these existences, “*exist basically at one time*” (“*other plays are going on simultaneously,*” “*lives are simultaneous*”), and it is “*verbal thought,*” which operates through “*single-line delineation,*” that leads to the false notion that there is any such thing as literal, successive re-incarnation.<sup>352</sup> “Your multidimensional personality, your true identity, the real you, is conscious of itself, as itself, in any of these roles,” but simultaneously, all at once, without time separating them into the discretely different focuses of consciousness they believe themselves to be.<sup>353</sup> All in all, the psyche is taking shape here as a kind of awareness that is capable of ‘seeing’ or ‘thinking’ not apparently discrete or sequential phenomenal unities of its own experience, but vast diversities of experience that appear and occur together and all at once. Not at all a consciousness in the modern sense—it lacks an apparently separable perceiver that would accompany its perceptions or thoughts—this awareness is much like the kind attributed to God or even angels in medieval thought.

Yet for all these claims about the soul being multiple, Jane and Seth might now look like they’re just talking old-school metaphysical shit. Half their keywords, after all, are still

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<sup>341</sup> SS, 37.

<sup>342</sup> SS, 37.

<sup>343</sup> SS, 21.

<sup>344</sup> SS, 21, 35.

<sup>345</sup> SS, 50.

<sup>346</sup> SS, 21.

<sup>347</sup> SS, 35.

<sup>348</sup> SS, 48.

<sup>349</sup> SS, 41.

<sup>350</sup> SS, 23.

<sup>351</sup> SS, 27.

<sup>352</sup> SS, 48, 50.

<sup>353</sup> SS, 52.

the modern equivalents or detritus of many that held together the systems of medieval theology (soul, body, eternity, etc.), and they are used here merely to describe the familiar, outworn idea of another, primary world, which, even if it somehow “becomes” instead of remaining identical to itself, is endowed with more being or reality than our own, which in turn looks derived from it, as though from an origin. Not only is the soul said to fabricate worlds, epochs, and selves to inhabit them, but it is also referred to as “*source*,” “*origin*,” even as a “*god*”—one, too, that resembles the old metaphysical God by somehow creating the world *ex nihilo*, with the infinite power said to be its disposal. A being that also sounds nearly omniscient, its multiple focuses amounting to little more than a totalizing “god’s eye view” and that, like any metaphysical term or entity, transcends or pre-exists what comes after and from it. Which is perhaps why, you could end up thinking, it is spoken of as if it were a predicable substance or grammatical subject (which can, because it somehow has such an identity, come back to itself). And one, finally, that talks to itself through some kind of pre-verbal and telepathic “instantaneous communication” that words can probably only distort, which suggests that Jane’s Seth is never translating between our own world and another no better or perfect than it, but only spinning analogies about the other source-world—approximating it, as in theology, through condescension.

Yes, there are anachronistic words and themes here, and they often seem to give Jane’s Seth personality away as inconsistent. In the same séance or breathe, he appears to oscillate between a vernacular, pop-Platonic theology thick with a residue of the medieval era, and some 180°-opposite kind of thinking in which hypermodern and even technological metaphors replace the old characteristics ascribed to God and being; and during that bipolar bounce, he not only avoids deciding about the real, but he simply carries on, in an incoherent and inconsistent ramble that he nonetheless insists contains knowledge, truth, and even concepts. But come on—to walk away with such an impression from this encounter with Seth’s words would require skimming through them without care for how they are full of recurrent metaphors, valuations, descriptions, and even, as he keeps insisting for Jane, conceptualizations (although the presence of something like a “concept” here will require more justification), all of which eventually suggest a highly consistent discourse. And ignoring all that (as if, indeed, Jane couldn’t have really talked the way she does here) would make what Seth said about the worlds—his world, our own (as if there was ever just one down here to begin with), and the universe they hang in—an unmotivated and complete accident. For instead of serving to buttress the priority and purity of another world, his claims about language’s inadequacy for describing it usually come with others asserting that reality is composed of a multiplicity of structures of intelligibility that are never finally translatable by means of some ultimate, divine code. And far from appearing to be the junior subordinate to the psyche and its realm, the multiplicity of worlds to which all these languages correspond is almost always talked up alongside or during a lead-in to admissions about the limits of the psyche’s knowledge (“we are still alert to other to other, quite alien systems of reality that flash on the very outskirts of consciousness as we know it”<sup>354</sup>), just as happens around mentions of multiple selves (“in the infinite varieties of consciousness, we are still aware of [only] a small percentage of the entire banks of personalities that exist [in us]”<sup>355</sup>). Some of these worlds are said to be above that of the psyche, even as Seth cautions against using spatial and directional metaphors to comprehend the structure and shape of

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<sup>354</sup> SS, 23.

<sup>355</sup> SS, 21.

the real, as if this portrait of a poly-centric cosmos or “multiverse”<sup>356</sup> (so called because there is not “one simple, cozy universe”<sup>357</sup>) actually means that his description of his environment could never be of the first, true, and real world but merely of *an* other world that includes within itself many others, while others still lie adjacent, parallel to, or above it, like galaxies in clusters, and superclusters in the universe.

Not that all this gets Seth out of the metaphysical corner he was just backed into. Just because it turns out that he and his psyche are gods with a lot left to learn, and that live in a world that might only be a particularly upscale city in a geographically de-centered country without a lingua franca, doesn’t mean that they’re not also real estate moguls colonizing outlying land into suburbs populated by programmable automatons. And if there’s actually a coherent cosmological structure at work here, then it certainly seems to lend itself to such a scenario, given the ordering that has been so repeatedly implied or made explicit throughout: first the soul, then its incarnations; first spirit, then the matter it creates; first eternity, second, time; and then on down the line, a whole slew of ancient and modern Western, even explicitly Platonic, hierarchies, all seemingly neat in place—truth/appearance, idea/manifestation, soul/organ (that is, instrument), self/role, and even One/multiple. But once again, Jane, especially when Seth, proves to play a tough game. While it remains to be seen whether any one of these hierarchies is eventually left unchallenged or not avowedly dispensed with by them, those most immediately pertinent to the issue of the soul are taken care of immediately.

The soul, he says quite explicitly, is not self-sufficient, but comes with a need to actualize its potential. While it “has within it infinite sources of creativity and unlimited possibilities of development,” it “must find . . . ways to bring into existence those untold creations.”<sup>358</sup> Not only does it lack something and thereby depend on its incarnation to realize itself (“the multidimensional self cannot act within three dimensional reality until it materializes a portion of itself within it”<sup>359</sup>) but also and only as this self does it “bring about all kinds of creativity that *could not appear otherwise*.”<sup>360</sup> The creative drama of the “three-dimensional personality” is also a process by which the psyche acquires knowledge it lacks; it “learns through its own actions,” “tries out an endless variety of poses, behavior patterns, attitudes,” and is “affected by the various plays in which it takes part” via “instant communication and an instant, if you prefer, feedback system.”<sup>361</sup> And since, as Seth has already noted, the three-dimensional self can only actualize the soul’s potential through acting autonomously and of its own accord, it is not at all the mere puppet or instrument of its soul. The latter is “strengthened” by its selves’ creativity and freedom, “expanded” through incarnation.<sup>362</sup> All of which goes to show that even if the soul, its ideas, and potentials come first, these are absolutely dependent on material, anthropological-subjective existence for their realization. Something is missing or lacking in the psyche, which then makes itself into a material, worlded existence in order to test and develop itself until it knows itself by means of this other itself that in turn shapes it—a claim, of course, that upsets the tacit hierarchy that seemed to be informing this vision of reality by making it

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<sup>356</sup> The term is used throughout Jane’s books.

<sup>357</sup> *SS*, 23.

<sup>358</sup> *SS*, 50.

<sup>359</sup> *SS*, 51.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> *SS*, 74.

difficult to say that the psyche (and perhaps also, as was previously seen, spirit and God) is accorded more priority and being than its embodiment and incarnation. In fact, since there is no ultimate difference between the psyche and its selves, the latter only fully realize the psyche's potential by becoming cognizant of their identity with it: "They must . . . come to understand their roles as actors, [and] 'finally' from their roles, and through another act of comprehension, return" in a homecoming that "will release the three-dimensional self for further development in another system of reality."<sup>363</sup>

But wait, slow down, hold up; even though the soul is lacking the actuality and knowledge that only its incarnation can give it, it now looks quite apparent that Jane has unwittingly imagined or conceived the whole matter in terms that probably keep in place the old metaphysical apparatus that it would then only superficially undo. The movement described here seems teleological, in the paradigmatically modern, dialectical manner that shows up not only in philosophy but in fiction, autobiography, theology, and psychotherapy as well. The self, whether God's or man's, is merely a potential existence and incipient knowledge until it passes out of itself and into a worldly existence in which it seeks itself, via a striving and labor by which it finally finds itself by rediscovering that it always was what it now has come (to know itself) to be, through the detours of getting alienated and coming up lost. When applied to the "matters" of God or being, the structure of that movement, even if it makes matter, man, and world necessary to the unfolding of the divine and somehow on par with it, also rather famously—or so it is said—reduces them to the mere means of a trajectory of self-alienation that always overcomes and assimilates them when it reaches the end of its circle, which thus makes it unclear if the world of appearances and time are ever anything but secondary and derived. And the same problem seems to get set up and repeated here.

Proving again that's he's as much brain as ghost, Seth surprisingly anticipates the objection that he's merely made the self and the world manifestations of a soul or God that annihilates them when the circle of their time closes; and he appears to do so out of concern for how the Eastern religions that were then seeing a surge in popularity have often come accompanied with or been understood by means of such a teleology. "Often it seems," he says in the next chapter, "that the soul is thought of as a precious stone to be finally presented as a gift to God . . . something highly prized that must be lost; the losing it being considered a fine gift to the receiver."<sup>364</sup> "In many philosophies," he continues, "this sort of idea is retained—the soul being returned to a primal giver, or being dissolved in a nebulous state somewhere between being and non-being."<sup>365</sup> Seth attributes the pervasiveness of this idea that the self is annihilated upon realizing its identity with the soul or God to the fact that *"you think of the soul . . . in the light of erroneous conceptions that you hold regarding even the nature of your personality."*<sup>366</sup> After reiterating his claim that the ego suppresses awareness of how it "constantly changes" by "focusing . . . upon the similarities that are woven through [its] behavior" instead of on the differences, he says that *"upon these you build a theory that the self follows a pattern that you, instead, have transposed upon it"—a "transposed pattern" that "prevents you from seeing the self as it really is" and that "you also project . . . upon your conception of the reality of the soul."*<sup>367</sup> Not only does this lead to the popular Christian idea of the soul as "an immortalized

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<sup>363</sup> *JS*, 54.

<sup>364</sup> *JS*, 72.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> *JS*, 74.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*



ego” whose “identity” is upon death “maintained unchanged though an endless eternity”<sup>368</sup> (one, Seth says, that “would be dead indeed”<sup>369</sup>), but it also conditions the ego to “worry for” its “physical identity” and regard its death and return to the soul as complete annihilation.<sup>370</sup> But both beliefs, he asserts, are invalid. While “it would be much easier simply to tell you that your own individuality exists, and let it go at that,” the “truth is that that the personality that you are now and the personality that you have been and will be . . . all of these personalities are manifestations of the soul” and not, consequently, completely independent existences destined to remain forever identical with themselves, to never in any way die; yet on the other hand, while “your own personality as you know it” is this way “a portion of the soul,” *it will also for that reason “never be destroyed or lost . . . or gobbled by the soul, nor erased by it, nor subjugated by it.”*<sup>371</sup> Just as the soul “eternally changes” by creating itself into personas, so do these selves continually and forever change through that same multiplication. Following death, the self “continues to grow and develop, but its growth and development is highly dependent upon its realization that while it is distinct and individual, it is also but one manifestation of the soul.”<sup>372</sup> Which means that the soul’s greater self-creation is thus also experienced as its own, but also that it *at the same time “exist[s] independently”* and is “*free to create and develop*” as itself, either through reliving in a virtual, (more) imaginary fashion the life it just lived, or by choosing, instead, to multiply itself by creating incarnations that would then be its own (even as they might also be the first soul’s).

Seth’s repeated claims that “you continually create your soul as it continually creates you”—that is, in a bidirectional and reciprocal way—are now beginning to make more sense. The mutual identity of the self and the soul only appears to be a hierarchical, instrumental, and teleological relation when viewed from the perspective of the ego, whose language opposes identity to difference and becoming, unity to multiplicity, and eternity to time. Yes, Seth says, *the psyche is a “superself.”*<sup>373</sup> But this means that “it is a grouping of nonphysical consciousnesses that nevertheless knows itself as an identity,” and not “a separate, apart-from-you thing” that is somehow above, beyond, or “divorced from” the multitude of selves comprising it. “The identity” of the soul instead “*is what they are, as though it never transcends or subsumes them.*” “Look at it this way,” Seth says, “The young woman through whom I speak once stated in a poem, and I quote: *These atoms speak, and call themselves my name.*”<sup>374</sup> The atoms constituting your flesh are you, he continues, but nonetheless “within your body you cannot put your finger upon your own identity.”<sup>375</sup> Now “*the identity of the soul can be seen from the same viewpoint. It knows who it is, and is far more certain of its identity than your physical self is of its identity. And yet now where . . . can the identity of the soul as such be found?*”<sup>376</sup> Without pretending to provide a final answer to the question or suspending the paradox it points to, Seth places it across and throughout “*many other individual consciousnesses.*”<sup>377</sup> The psyche is paradoxically “a *gestalt*” of all these, and thus a “prime identity” able to “*maintain its own identity, its own I-am-*

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> SS, 72.

<sup>370</sup> SS, 83.

<sup>371</sup> SS, 75.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> SS, 89.

<sup>374</sup> SS, 82.

<sup>375</sup> SS, 82.

<sup>376</sup> SS, 83.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

ness,' even while it is aware that its 'I-am-ness' may be part of another"—another of those selves to which it is at once transcendent and immanent.<sup>378</sup>

Understanding this peculiar “identity”—that shared by things that are at once the same as and different from each other—further requires seeing that “*the soul is not a closed system*”<sup>379</sup>:

[C]onsciousness can never be a closed system, and all barriers of such nature are illusion. Therefore the soul is not a closed system. When you consider the soul, however, you usually think of it in such a light—unchanging, a psychic or spiritual citadel. But citadels not only keep out invaders, they also prevent expansion [. . .] There are many matters that are difficult to express in words, for you are so afraid for your own identity that you resist the idea that the soul, for example, is an open spiritual system [. . .] creativity that shoots out in all directions.<sup>380</sup>

The psyche’s openness, it would seem, is not just to all the self-driven changes of the multiplicity of its parts, but also to other psyches; *although “it may seem inconceivable,” the psyche’s “I-am-ness is retained even though it may . . . merge with and travel through” other psyches.*<sup>381</sup>

Yet if this peculiar identity still seems like it must be irredeemably teleological—and thus also offering neither a place nor “future” for the selves that would be destroyed through returning to their origin—then this is because it is usually refracted through time, which is then opposed to eternity. Still insisting that trying to gaze at the psyche from within ordinary time always results in a distorted perspective, Seth explains that all of its aspects are eternal, and even thereby coeval with each other. While recounting nostalgically the lives of some of his earthly incarnations (including those of a starving, destitute mother of twelve and a philandering sixth century pope), he says that “these personalities are not locked up inside of what I am,” but instead “co-exist with me” or “still exist and are independent.”<sup>382</sup> The same goes for himself in his relation to “Seth Two,” even though the latter is apparently “more advanced.”<sup>383</sup> “Though it seems to you,” he continues, “that reincarnational existences involve past or future events, *they are existences parallel or adjacent to your own present life and consciousness.* Other aspects of your greater identity exist about and around these.”<sup>384</sup> It is only because “your rigid ideas of time” are used to grasp the simultaneity of these aspects of the psyche that the latter appears to be a totality both resulting from the progressive snowballing of its selves and awaiting them as their extratemporal, final cause. The real story is far more strange, yet still meaningful; although selves somehow eventually get morphed into larger version of themselves and thus seem to evince such reciprocal causality, they are also left behind after jumping ahead. “Using the analogy of childhood,” he says, “*it is as if the child within you is part of your memory and experience, and yet in another way has left you, gone apart from you.*”<sup>385</sup> In the same way, “*the people that I have been have gone their own way, and yet are a part of me and I of them.*”<sup>386</sup> The self that remains behind after it has gone ahead and become someone

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> SS, 76.

<sup>380</sup> SS, 76.

<sup>381</sup> SS, 83.

<sup>382</sup> SS, 353.

<sup>383</sup> SS, 358.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> SS, 359.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

or something else continues to change, just as the self it changes into has already moved on by the time it arrives: “Seth Two does represent what I will become, to some extent, and in your terms, yet when I become what he is, he will be something different.”<sup>387</sup> The same goes for Jane, who “may become what I am, but then I will be far different.”<sup>388</sup> So Jane will someday become Seth, who will by then have returned to himself as Seth II, who will have also by then have gone to become something else (but not entirely). But in the meantime, they affect and get changed by the people standing ahead and behind them in the long line to (self-) supersession, even talking to them over the ether in order to do so. “My experience enriches Seth II, and his experiences enrich me,” while Jane gets “expanded through relationship with me, and I also gain through the experience.”<sup>389</sup>

#### TURNING THE CHANNEL: STATION JANE AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIMULCAST

Perhaps we, too, have again been affected by the transmissions coming across this fantastic interchange, since it has proved surprisingly difficult to ascribe a teleological direction to the movement of the currents shooting through and connecting all the different stops on the circuit. Project time onto that tangled network of relations, and what gets quickly lost is that in signaling and transmitting (to) the others, each party on the line is both continuous and discontinuous with the other, or within and outside it, but without the wires coiling around and up in a spiral that narrows to a sublimating top. Even when the quantity and rate of information exchange rises so high that some parties are beckoned forward to die in order to become their next selves, they also get left behind and in place, suspended in an eternity in which they carry on with their eternal becoming, whatever superself that exists across and within the network never altogether absorbing or containing them. Without that expected teleological structure and the temporal circling it entails in place, it becomes difficult to know which, if any, of the traditional metaphysical terms comes first: whether God and man, soul and mortal self, unity and multiplicity, or identity and instantiation, everything is happening all at once, not first and then second; and whatever is happening never stays the same, but only has an identity insofar as it is flux, becoming, change, and different from itself. A surprise indeed, this other psyche.

But has its description really amounted to a metaphysical upset? Perhaps so, if the reader has herself become upset, whether about the preposterousness of reading Jane’s words this way or the author’s apparently naïve confidence that doing so will yield connections between her discourse and those of some philosophers from whom she seems only remote; and maybe even especially so, since those newly-laid lines of communication are now transmitting a channel that it’s hard to turn off, even as it has become difficult to decide if the program that’s come through is a bad religious rerun, occasionally and accidentally profound sci-fi trash, or a possible sleeper hit worth at least a few more watches—a situation, at the very least, reflecting the metaphysically upended times. But the real problem is that the inversion was so explicit and palpable. Although a becoming God is far from new, one that does so without fully coming back to itself from incarnation and manifestation basically is, especially when it turns out that it distributes itself throughout a multiplicity of worlds that don’t seem to be in orbit around any center, and that haven’t yet

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<sup>387</sup> *JS*, 358.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> *JS*, 358.

sounded like they're stacked up in an ascending pyramid, atop of which sits their self-giving, unmovable cause; while Buddhism, moreover, has for an epoch denied the ego substantiality and identity, Seth's description of the becoming and flux of itself and reality as its true "identity" is far from standard fair in the civilization that Plato built; and finally, while no strangers to decades more hard- and over-wired than Jane's, all the technological metaphors ("system," "computer," "information," "program," "transmission") employed by Seth to characterize the divine effectively detour the most basic concepts of the latter; after all, divinity is still considered by those that espouse it more natural than nature, and not something you fabricate, make up, or do—especially while in the backseat, it doing you. But since she scored that way, and big time, coming out the victor in the second game of a hot contest—Jane vs. metaphysics—for which she was overwhelmingly not favored, then what else can her win be called, but a sheer upset?

But to stop there would be to forfeit play, since metaphysics is still a far more serious game than the comedy now acknowledged to have always been integral to playing it. Whether we've switched on channel Heidegger to be reached by a voice saying that "the systematic articulation of truth at any given time 'about' beings as a whole is called metaphysics"<sup>390</sup> and that metaphysics forgets (that it forgets) being and thus must give way to another thinking, or are glued to the Derrida show, where "presence," the "absolutely central form of being" in metaphysics ("and specifically consciousness" as "self-presence"), turns out to be an "effect" of difference<sup>391</sup> and therefore always undergoing its own deconstruction (even as "there is not a transgression" or "landing into a pure and simple beyond of metaphysics" in that "every transgressive gesture reencloses us—by giving us a hold on the closure of metaphysics—in this closure"<sup>392</sup>), or are picking up through the static that always frays Deleuze's signal that "the death of metaphysics or the overcoming of philosophy has never been a problem"<sup>393</sup> but "just tiresome, idle chatter"<sup>394</sup> since philosophy, both "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts"<sup>395</sup> and "knowledge through pure concepts,"<sup>396</sup> is always needed, and now has for its task "the reversal of Platonism"<sup>397</sup> (conceived as treating all instances of the real as simulacra and thus "in essence" as permanently, continuously variable) none of the programs are easy to follow, each one being composed of intricate stories that confound even the most die-hard viewers, revolving as they do around characters that dialogue about seasons-old plot-lines, which concern motifs of vast proportion and weight, be they truth, presence, being, becoming identity, or difference, all of which are given treatments so thick that they can be picked and hammered at, even destroyed by their most shrewd fans, and still manage to resurrect themselves seasons later to prove their almost perennial hold on audiences, whom nonetheless tend to follow only one station's line-up over the others, since each one presents such a strong, almost inflexible take on Western metaphysics, the task put to thinking, and the questions best suited for pulling that off. For all its determination and surprise hits, "Station J-A-N-E,"

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<sup>390</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 185.

<sup>391</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 16.

<sup>392</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>393</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 9.

Hereafter cited as *WIP?*

<sup>394</sup> *WIP?*, 9.

<sup>395</sup> *WIP?*, 2.

<sup>396</sup> *WIP?*, 7.

<sup>397</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 253.

as she once jokingly called herself, can seem feeble in comparison, totally bush-league, with low budgets, a B-grade cast acting out roles made for the stars (while Plato does make a few cameos, and William James guests for a season, they both seem so out of place, especially when fed the occasional mediocre line), and overreaching writers that may at best tackle only the encyclopedia versions of the classic themes, which makes ambiguous whether the sometimes clever treatments they receive are worth a close read, an explication, an argument. Watched one atop the other, split-screen, the philosophical broadcast seems likely to expose the dialogue of even Jane's best shows as barely consistent, pieced-together cut-ups that parrot the big network's profundities with stories about identity, becoming, and multiplicity that can barely be read or deciphered, let alone read back to the kingpin writers or to the giants of philosophical dramaturgy under whom they studied to develop their chops. But such a reading is what it will take, to check whether her indie operation might be worth comparing to theirs, whether it might be ready for prime time, and prime time ready for it; yet uncross the two signals, or turn off Jane's (in disgust, perhaps, because the shows' plots seem to collapse when scrutinized logically), and all the loose threads from these last episodes are never going to get picked back up, the developing story's cliffhangers not reached, the answers (which, like all those of worth, end up being provisional) to the questions posed by her other psyche, never heard, read, or re-written, and, in short, play will be forfeited—but this time by the other side, now made nervous about the prospect of playing pick-up with such street trash.

So don't switch the channel; the simulcast is about to start, and I can promise that it'll be worth tuning into.

“A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK”—“A BODY OF THEORY”—FOR “A WORLD WHERE I’D FEEL A PART OF EVERYTHING I SAW...”

*However intentional or unconscious it was, it is now apparent that Jane thought and thereby worked a “metaphysical upset” in which spirit was made to become. But how did the concepts (the “theory”) through which she did this stem from her own problems? Although it is now clear that Jane, however she wanted to be read and interpreted, was sufficiently conceptual to be read conceptually, what still remains uncertain is how she understood the thinking of her other self. So far, we have seen that she tested “Seth” until he proved valid enough to be allowed to speak freely and that he then articulated a vernacular metaphysics that addressed some of her questions about “spirit.” Yet how did this “metaphysics” bear on the questions that she kept raising about the plural form of her psyche?*

*This chapter traces the development of her thinking on this point as it occurred during and after the dictation and editing of Seth Speaks. After Jane produces, as Seth, an account of the different modes consciousness can assume in order to access different facets of time and the psyche, her students began channeling their own other personalities (which ostensibly belong to their “past” incarnations). Both events intensify her questions about what the self is, but she finds herself unable to give them a novel or precise form. What happens instead are a series of visions in which Jane experiences herself as a child, another person, another living being, and then as an “explosion” of consciousness. Still unable to account in ordinary terms for the significance of these visions for her questions, Jane (or her psyche) resorts to what might have functioned for her as another mode of thought and speech—glossolalia. Underneath its nonsense or asignificance, Jane detects a “language” capable of expressing her experience of being at once herself and another. Even if the thinking that occurs through it is not available to discourse, it triggers more visions and a surge of writerly and quasi-intellectual creativity that results in a “conceptual framework” and “body of theory” addressing the problem of the plural self. (The theory itself is examined in the next chapter.)*

*The analysis of this stage of the development of Jane’s thinking may be concealed in the narrative form of this chapter, but this was not done for aesthetic reasons. By (re-) telling as a story Jane’s own version of her story, I have sought not to impose on her the sort of interpretative apparatus that I do in subsequent chapters and to show, thereby, a few things: (1.) the fact that Jane’s questions are precisely addressed by visions and other “irrational” religious phenomena that also open to new questions; (2.) that Jane herself in fact attempted to articulate “theory” and “concepts” to account for her experiences; (3.) understanding her mystical-visionary experiment is the basis for interpreting her such that precise anthropological engagement becomes indissociable from philosophical reading. With all this understood, both the need for an exchange between Jane and philosophy “proper” and an appropriate method for one become apparent.*

Maybe it was all just linguistic mash-up, happenstance collage, a somewhat orderly word-salad, not manifestly psychotic, but secretly so, its glimmering meaning-effect transfixing, then insinuating itself into you, so that you found coherence where none was, incipient concepts congealing out of words that so divergently pull away from each other’s meanings that a second examination will yield their nonsense, at least the breaks in signification they cannot cross, over which they hang, fail to cohere, and that analysis, responsible, meticulous breaking-down of what already proved to be suffering a breakdown, would have exposed, read symptomatically, as the gaffs and symptoms of a complex, individual, social, both, Jane’s at any rate, because something happened, must have, to make her so mad, call herself “Seth,” drone on in trances, and if it thought in her, it pulled down into the dark keywords from waking life, charged them up with affect, shot them, sure, right back into that spiritual drone, but the real action’s not upstairs, but in the other scene, and if

philosophy is in play, it should only furnish the tools for the excavation, rhetorical means for the case study, the psychoanalysis eschewed in favor of this other analysis, of this “other psyche,” ersatz psyche, read propositionally, like reason stitched its words together, so that they could be forced to dialogue, talk with, impinge upon something they never concerned, concepts or *topoi*, since they’re just loose metaphors, completely disordered, occasional, must be, that concern the transcendent, the beyond, some zombie God on furlough from his tomb, not being, becoming, thinking, it’s quixotic to think so, test them, see what happens, eternal becoming can’t be thought (this can become different, losing some qualities, taking on others, only if there is before and after, time differentiating it, it differentiating itself in or as time, but what’s this, no time, it becomes, it’s nonsense proper), neither can identity that’s never the same (“that’s not identity, but its death, complete erasure, pure singularity”), that’s out of time (“everything is all at once, so no I, no it”), think through it, all of it put together, the different ideas don’t add up, nothing consists, so back to the problem, the missed point, the need for analysis, of her speech, it’s symptomatic, forget the rest, find the key, open-says-me, psychobiography, she described visions, which were hallucinations, which came with a thought-disorder, language disorder, automatism, propelled by foreclosure, psychosis, psychosis . . .

With an “object” as dangerous, foreign, and repulsive as Jane on the table, deal meticulously, step-by-step with the elements, possible objections to, and lacunae of the argument being made about it, or else the reader disappears. With an “object” as dangerous, foreign, and repulsive as Jane on the table, deal meticulously with the elements, possible objections to, and lacunae of the argument being made about it, and the reader disappears. Similar double binds no doubt govern the writing of most books, so the one in play here is neither scarcely unique, nor something worthy of complaint. But that doesn’t mean a solution isn’t called for, at least for those in dialogue with this text. So from here on out, the reader is asked to concede to the Jane speaking here not only the presumption that she is not simply or entirely mad, but also the benefit of the doubt where her capacity to think is concerned. Otherwise, it will be impossible to make any argument at all, in a text that will then never get moving. In return, “Jane”—another version of myself, spoken by her (another version of her, spoken by me)—promises not to misrepresent or misconstrue herself, at least according to her own understanding of what not fibbing about oneself entails, and as much as that is at all possible. Henceforth, then, the reader can trust that the writer is only screwing with his head, but not deceitfully, while the writer, Jane and me, will presume that he doesn’t have to justify herself at every turn, but only the most cunningly sharp of them.

Including the hard right curve into which the text just banked: Why not psychoanalyze Jane, instead of explicating and taking up her thinking? The question will be posed from points all along the turn, but it’s only those exercising maximum gravitational pull on us that will get a response. (The others along the gauntlet, assuming as they do that everything begins and ends with psychoanalysis, need to show their strength if that’s what they want). But right in their middle, some worthwhile questions nearly draw things off course, and into a complete turnover . . . Since Lacan, and perhaps somehow even psychoanalysis itself, eventually comes to conceptualize the hysteric as or in light of the mystic, shouldn’t the question of how Jane might be both get posed here? And by not so subtly dodging these questions, didn’t you merely hightail it away from psychoanalysis a few chapters back, naively assuming that Freud could be reduced to a metaphysician of the subject? Hasn’t the unconscious really been at work here the whole time, Jane’s hysterically proliferating personas and theories, and your own in dangerous, perhaps indissoluble,

transference (or worse, identification) with them? Wouldn't a speculatively clinical account of her life address the very questions that interest you, by requiring research that would illumine how the historical conditions of Jane's existence are also psychic, and perhaps even common to the subject in modernity? So why do you instead oppose psychoanalysis to what you're looking for in Jane, as if it could offer nothing of help along the way? Especially when you haven't even examined how the problem of psychosis—its being continually and profoundly distinguished from the psychic life of the subject as such—might be at work here?

In order to maintain the momentum of Jane's other psyche against the drag of these questions, they'll only be addressed directly and at length at various stops further down the road. Yet a truncated version of the response they demand has to be offered now. If it were indeed possible to divide up neatly and into two parts the interlocutors and motives behind these questions, then the following would be asked of them. Those that think psychoanalysis deserves the fair shake it hasn't yet received, please hold tight; many of your questions will be returned to in the course of things, once the outline of the other psyche being drawn here is more complete, when psychoanalysis will be evaluated. But those presuming a series of psychoanalysis' commonplaces—that psychoanalysis is capable of furnishing conceptual resources appropriate to thinking any problematic, that a (meta-) psychology of sexual drives doesn't itself require questioning and justification, that psychoanalysis need not account for its own history, and finally, that Freud's words were the first and most essential to be said about "the" unconscious, and thus that Jane ought to be considered in light of them—are in turn asked to consider some questions that guide and spring from the present inquiry, often right out of Jane's own. The first of them—once again, "who speaks?"—is a problem too big, too vague to be asked, one might say; but it has already been taken up here locally, in the vicinity of Jane's life and work, and the series of problems that thereby turned out to be tied up with it have hardly left psychoanalysis sitting safe or pretty, since their threads have passed through the history of its own vexed relation to hysteria, possession, and the occult, and thus into the philosophical issue of how the subject (of the unconscious) it postulates may not be possible in these latter contexts (an issue which has tended to upset or interfere with it). And now, as this question draws us in again, the lines of its web are starting to pull so taut that everything looks ready to snap and give way. Yet it's not the threads themselves but their anchors that are about to come crashing into the picture; crowding and overwhelming its frame, all of these—the Cartesianism latent even in psychoanalysis, and the relation to language the latter presumes for the most part hold for the subject—will look unsure when put next to some questions that psychoanalysis has only managed to address by being turned upside down, even shaken down for all it's worth. How is it that dissociative states and trances—syncope—could involve consciousness, and what would happen to any basic concept of the unconscious were that the case? What would happen to language in the event of a consciousness neither quite conscious nor unconscious, and how could conceiving the real as being, at bottom, change and multiplicity end up bringing this consciousness about? How, moreover, could it really be reached, since two old modern, Cartesian equations—ego/person = consciousness and reality=its object—seems to block the way? And, finally, if the escape route blazed by Jane as she broke through those barricades was the elaboration of another mode of self—a play of desubjectivation and polysubjectivation—then what becomes of psychoanalytic thought, given its persistent attachments to certain notions of the subject? Will it remain tethered to an old subject and its unconscious, or will it abandon it, hazarding its own reiteration and transformation? And as the questions proliferate, "who speaks?" will become a question of such a scope that



Jane's Seth's own explanation of his mode of thinking—"I am not a philosopher"—will seem only half-believable, and then need to be rejected altogether.

Especially because all the *dramatis personae* clamoring to speak in the channeling session that will soon begin include some undead philosophers ready to transmit thoughts about consciousness, imagination, the subject, mysticism, "God," and even being, in a way uncommon of them, as if something about the medium through whom or which they will come has led them to lend fragments of themselves they would otherwise hold back. Yet if all this again seems too much, that's perhaps because we've gotten ahead of ourselves. This tangle of problems will reveal itself, so back to the broadcast on station "J-A-N-E". . .

#### MOBILITY AND INTENSITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The last episode left off with the narrator feeling compelled to set Jane and Seth up for a tag-team brawl they seemed to stand little chance of surviving, even while it was unclear whether they'd be pitted against the very same amnesiac metaphysicians that menaced Heidegger and that Derrida and Deleuze rumbled with using different tactics and principles of combat than his, or whether their opponent was more vague—a way of thinking and being so diffusely hidden in life and language that it might never fight fair, but only agglutinate together out of the background to stalk and jump the backs of its prey nights before the scheduled battles. Also murky was just what the pair had that might be worth wielding in the ring, since their other psyche looked to be a weapon more amateur than professional—maybe not even effective, depending on who's coaching or calling the shots (becoming is a losing banner to fight under, according to most). But the fight can only be scheduled and bets placed once the story has moved on some more, exposing the stuff Jane and Seth are made of, and just how they might be able to work the metaphysical upset they seem to have promised.

Yet the show starts up again with another twist. While Seth's book seemed to have taken shape as a treatise of pop ontology, it suddenly veers off again, this time to become pragmatic and even explicitly technical.

"I hope in this book," he says, winding down his long description of the psyche and his environment, "not only to assure you of the eternal validity of your soul... but to help you sense its vital reality within yourself."<sup>398</sup> And then a few pages later, Rob still transcribing: "If the desire" for this "is strong enough, then you will be automatically led to experiences that will result in vivid, unmistakable subjective knowledge. There are methods that will enable you to do this, and I will give you some toward the end of the book.

For now, here is one quite effective but simple exercise. Close your eyes after having read this chapter to this point, and try to sense within yourself the source of power from which your own breathing and life forces come . . . When you feel within yourself this source, then try to sense this power flow outward throughout your physical being, through all your fingertips and toes, through the pores of your body, all directions, with yourself as center. Imagine the rays undiminished, reaching then through the foliage of the clouds above, through the center of the earth below, extending even to the farthest reaches of the universe.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> SS, 73.

<sup>399</sup> SS, 77.

The exercise is neither merely symbolic nor confined to the imagination but is “based on fact,” since “emanations from your consciousness and the creativity of your soul do indeed reach outward in that manner.”<sup>400</sup> When the psyche’s reality is felt in this way, its assured, cavalier attitude about alterity and the prospect of its own disappearances (“not frightened for its identity . . . it is not afraid of being overwhelmed by experience”<sup>401</sup>) is taken up as the individual’s own; minus that intuitive knowledge, the individual becomes paranoid, afraid of being swept away by the slightest message from its psyche. “I am not speaking merely of abilities loosely called extrasensory perception,” since the category “gives you but a crude and distorted idea” of the constant communications sent by the psyche and its aspects to the conscious self—the dreams, flashes of insight, reveries, telepathic messages and even hallucinations that would permeate and constitute consciousness if the ego did not fearfully suppress them.<sup>402</sup> “Such things,” he continues, “can give you hints of that other kind of perception” beyond that coming through the senses, and which will lead back to the psyche.<sup>403</sup> The point “is not meant to be esoteric” or without “practical meaning for your everyday lives,” but is to give you access to the “source of your own being and creativity,” and thus to “the many abilities” and “knowledge” of your other, “independent selves.”<sup>404</sup>

But everything hinges on cajoling the ego into loosening up and kicking back, so that it stops shutting down, off, and out the inner currents. Likely borrowing from William James, Jane-Seth dubs the ego’s waking awareness “the stream of consciousness,” explaining that “it is simply that—one small stream of thoughts, images, and impressions—that is part of a much deeper river of consciousness . . . your far greater existence and experience.”<sup>405</sup> But exclusively occupied with “examining this one small stream,” the ego becomes “hypnotized by its flow” and “entranced by its motion” so that the myriad currents coursing by go unnoticed.<sup>406</sup> “If you think of your stream . . . as transparent, however, then you can learn to look through and beneath it to others,” and even leap out of it to catch sight of or jump into neighboring, parallel flows.<sup>407</sup> Both things are constantly happening anyway, thoughts and images alien to the ego getting caught in the jets or seen from their peripheries during quiet moments, and the heavy flows they first ride even diverted during creative work, which is why the latter is always “multidimensional,” “its origin not from one reality, but from many” (and why artists often get so schizzed out).<sup>408</sup> But this connectedness, he continues, mostly gets reinterpreted, either religiously or scientifically, as the voices of God, angels, demons, and ghosts or as intrusions from the unconscious. And when the fluids get even more mixed up and put back together in the whirlpool of sleep—which is when the individual dives into deep intercourse with its other selves, and selects there, “from an infinity of probable events,” those to be actualized—the ego foregoes even the standard, faulty translations for totally violent interpretations: These experiences of communication with “the depths of your being” are not “translated” for want of appropriate symbols and

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<sup>400</sup> *SS*, 77.

<sup>401</sup> *SS*, 83.

<sup>402</sup> *SS*, 78.

<sup>403</sup> *SS*, 91.

<sup>404</sup> *SS*, 77.

<sup>405</sup> *SS*, 91.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>407</sup> *SS*, 91.

<sup>408</sup> *SS*, 92.

concepts and thus “do not remain in the morning,” which means that the “dreams formed from the information gained” during the plunge do little but distort it by unpacking it into language-born significations.<sup>409</sup> So although “the ego acts a dam,” he continues, this is “not because it was meant to, or because it is in the nature of an ego to behave in such a fashion, or even because it is a main function of an ego, but because you have been taught that the purpose of an ego is restrictive rather than expanding”; you generally “imagine that the ego is a very weak portion of the self” that therefore must defend itself from “far stronger” and “more dangerous” unconscious parts of itself, a belief that occludes its perception of the psyche and chokes its “native flexibility.”<sup>410</sup>

Helping the ego realize that it actually likes and gets on quite well with its others (an interesting and possibly less naïve claim that it may seem) is a matter of coaxing it out of the routines that make it such a dull, obsessively differentiated boy. Seth’s advice is that it first go to bed with them, at least two or three times a day. “Two periods of three hours would be quite sufficient for most people,” he says, explaining that “more frequent, briefer rest periods” would prevent “definite divisions” between areas of the psyche from forming, enabling a more “flexible and mobile” consciousness.<sup>411</sup> “The seeming great division between the waking self and the sleeping self is largely a result of [a] division in function”—physical life up above, psychic life down below—and the allotment of “a block of time” to each half.<sup>412</sup> The possibilities for different sleeping patterns created by artificial light should be utilized, he says, so that some sleeping takes place during the day and some work at night. Doing this would heighten awareness of the psyche, telepathic abilities, and dreams, render the experience of time “less rigorous and rigid,” eliminate the “deep separation you now feel between the waking and dreaming self,” lessen the mental illnesses (from senility to schizophrenia) the split is here said to help cause and also increase the concentration needed for work and life. All these effects would really result from a different waking experience, in which it would be apparent that awareness is not “like a steady beam of light,” but that it “does indeed flicker, and varies in intensity.”<sup>413</sup> Just as there are fluctuations of consciousness during sleep, so are there “rhythms” to waking awareness, which oscillates between active and inactive periods that typically go unperceived, these “high peaks” and sleep-like states alike “smothered” by the contemporary demand that the waking self constantly “go full blast ahead.”<sup>414</sup> Riding upon “these valleys and peaks” will allow the ego to become more fluid with the psyche.<sup>415</sup>

Rob found himself illustrating the problems with the wake-sleep dichotomy as dictation for the chapter on it was wrapping up. While transcribing in his personal shorthand, he gradually became aware that he couldn’t keep up with Seth’s pace at the usual rate; even after getting Seth to slow his delivery, he found himself falling behind, losing focus, skipping and misspelling words, forgetting his shorthand notations, then spelling out words in his head and shifting about in his chair to stay clear, until he looked down from this spreading fog to find garbled text—“*The spirit tre is never n a state of nethbignessm with its consceecness*

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<sup>409</sup> SS, 81.

<sup>410</sup> SS, 95.

<sup>411</sup> SS, 98.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> SS, 105.

<sup>414</sup> SS, 104.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

*xx extenigh. It os very important tre thanch be realize, fr thre if ech expt if a schtich it is.*"<sup>416</sup> Getting lucid after the ghost broke to let him rest took some time, the words from his mouth getting clipped and fried as much as those from his pen had. After the full return of his wits, they all resumed, Jane-as-Seth-again explaining that Rob had "kindly assisted" by demonstrating the final point of the chapter, which was that the ego relies so exclusively on "the mediumship of the body" to express its awareness that it tends to freak before the prospect of thinking without it.<sup>417</sup> No different, "Rob" had been unaware that his psyche had consented to go into "retreat" in order to demonstrate the claim, an experience so frightening that his ego itself would have avoided it. "Close to death," Seth continued, "the same sort of thing happens": "if the dying person overidentifies with the body, then he can easily panic" upon experiencing the fading of his bodily consciousness into what then looks to be a final "extinction."<sup>418</sup>

The claim comes on the last pages of the first part of *Seth Speaks* and provides a segue into the next—hundreds of pages devoted to the other realities accessible when consciousness crests above or falls below the range of "intensities" or "frequencies" ordinary, waking consciousness comprises. The first to be treated are the experiences of death and the zone of awareness encountered after it, with those of the psyche's other lifetimes and probable existences coming next, then knowledge of past, future, or alternate epochs and civilizations, and finally "the multidimensional God" itself (or being/becoming). While discussions of the nature of consciousness and instructions for altering it in order to experience or retrieve knowledge of these things are occasionally interspersed throughout the corresponding chapters, specific techniques do not come for another two hundred pages. At which point, under the heading of a chapter entitled "Alternate Presents and Multiple Focus," Seth distinguishes between a series of modes or "levels" of consciousness by enumerating the kinds of experience and knowledge that come through each.<sup>419</sup> At the beginning, a primary level ("A-1") that is slightly beyond, adjacent to, and mildly dissociated from ordinary, objective consciousness and the body, a focus from which the individual can survey its current thoughts and emotions, and unclutter and refresh the mind. Still adjacent to and occupying the same horizontal plane as ordinary consciousness is a further degree of this mode of awareness ("A-1-a"), in which alternate presents and parallel existences appear and can be tried out and played with by being made temporarily more actual than potential and virtual. Consciousness can also takes yet another step away, finding itself in a mode in which it is aware of another, collective kind of alternate present, that of nations, societies, and even great masses of animal species. And from there, the vertical descent begins, through which consciousness becomes aware of the past and future, of, first of all, "itself" in all its incarnations, and then, next, at a deeper level, of masses, whether geological, human, or animal. Going further, pure "ideas" and "concepts" can be perceived, as a "symbolic landscape," and, below that, at a rarely visited depth, the consciousness of any human persona, from whatever past or future age of the world, can be contacted and communicated with, and it is by means of taproots into such realms that great men and women—either a "di Vinci or Picasso," or an anonymous and misunderstood dreamer, says Seth—help steer the course of history and social life.<sup>420</sup> Beneath even all this, consciousness assumes the same

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<sup>416</sup> SS, 110.

<sup>417</sup> SS, 111.

<sup>418</sup> SS, 111.

<sup>419</sup> SS, 292.

<sup>420</sup> SS, 279.

modes as those of beings that never physically manifest, and that serve as guardians and custodians of the Earth . . .

While the entire discussion could seem merely religious and practical, its more profound implications were just to the side, and Jane grasped them: she would soon, in effect, be asking, “What is our consciousness if it cannot be strictly identified with the ego that seems to have or experience it, and what do this say about the psyche being?”

#### MORE DRAMATIS PERSONAE, MORE QUANDRIES

These issues indeed loomed large in Jane’s mind while she was channeling Seth’s book. While her alter was on its way to addressing her questions about him and the psyche, she kept working toward her own understanding of them. This time, her experiments would no longer be so private—she staged them in the classes she was holding in her and Rob’s apartment, with the small group of people drawn to them and into the world taking imprecise and unstable form around her psyche. And now she only set loose the forces that drove that exploration under the compulsion of her own alienation, not the one that had made her so servile to her image of science years back, before she exorcised that superego so that she could invite into herself more of those creative and daring spirits she was soon calling *daimons*.

Not that she wasn’t driven by intellectual problems as much as her desire for commerce with that legion: things went down in the classes that she could scarcely account for or explain. “Intuitively I was intrigued,” she wrote of them. “Intellectually I was scandalized. I admit this freely because it was my incessant questioning that finally led me to keep notes of everything that went on.”<sup>421</sup> The problem was not only that she couldn’t always divide class participants’ visions from the figments she thought she might be suggesting into their imaginations; it was also the complete absence of a science or knowledge that could furnish an appropriate measure for that by first explaining them both. The plaint she had already twice filed with science and religion never came back answered, so her self-advocacy got even louder. Nothing of what Spiritualism, the occult, or Christianity said about “good and bad spirits, demons, and possession” began to match or approach what she was encountering with and in Seth, while the science that should have understood visions, automatic speech, and personalities like him, didn’t: “Any psychology worthy of the name must be large enough to contain all our psychologically vital . . . experiences, whether or not they fit into conventional ideas about the characteristics of consciousness.”<sup>422</sup> So it was back to the drawing board, where she started sketching what proved to be the outlines of her own attempt at a psychology. What she didn’t get about the task, she later explained, was that it would first require tightly twisting her intellect around her psyche so that they could grow into each other’s tissues and make a new organ capable of it.

Seth instigated this round of quandaries by encouraging the class she was channeling him for to undertake a visionary trip into and via the “A-2” consciousness that he had discussed during book dictation a few months earlier. Think of it as a door, she said as him, while the small group set aside their wine glasses and cigarettes and started imagining the

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<sup>421</sup> Jane Roberts, *Adventures in Consciousness* (Needham, Massachusetts: Moment Point Press, 1999), 4. Hereafter cited as AC.

<sup>422</sup> AC, xi-xii.

scene prescribed to them in a speech that swelled with hypnotic suggestions and commands. “You are in the midst of other realities,” he told them, “but you are in the habit of blocking them out. You are now beginning to release your perceptions, to open doors that have been closed. Therefore, imagine this consciousness as a doorway adjacent to your normal consciousness, and see it open.”<sup>423</sup> Like the sort of experienced hypnotist she might have been becoming, Seth then suggested that “other realities and people with whom you have always been acquainted” lay beyond the door, that his listeners’ bodies would “help” but “not hamper” the inner journey by which they “are getting glimpses of another reality,” even as they pass by it and into others—one full of other possible versions of the events of their lives, and another in which these are as yet vague potentials and “unborn, while in greater terms they are already accomplished and yet coming into fresh existence.”<sup>424</sup> After what felt like a half-hour in those places, Jane and her students came out of their trances, the latter reporting what happened in them. Jane’s friend Sue found herself standing beside a lake with a man in a scene she experienced as being completely real... before it disappeared when Seth’s instructions to go further transported her and the stranger to a gigantic and equally vivid formation of light. A less assuring vision came to a young ex-minister who found himself amidst a horde of literally crusading medieval Christians that encountered, battled, and brutally slaughtered a group of Muslims, leaving the grass underfoot red with spilt blood, and him fearfully white.

While running through her mind the questions she says she then always brought to bear on such visions—“was this a symbolic statement of dramatized feelings...?” “a legitimate glimpse into reincarnational pasts?” “or... a brief backward glance into history, a [merely] psychological snapshot of a vanished time?”<sup>425</sup>—something else happened, and she found herself out of her body, shooting up the pyramid that she had continued to see above her before the faint voice of “Seth II” would come through. The latter began discoursing in the plural about how they observe this world, which they claimed to have basically set in motion and to revere but not understand before encouraging their audience to attempt to gaze back at those watching them. The money again wasn’t so much in Seth II’s words as in what they induced—a couple people saying afterwards that they had seen a pyramid glowing above Jane’s head during the speech, and many more claiming they’d seen or sensed gigantic, “three-dimensional blurred faces” on the ceiling and filling up the room.<sup>426</sup> Jane disappointed all of them by resisting the whole thing, telling them that they might have been merely hallucinating under the influence of her and Seth’s suggestions. Which was in part what she thought: “I wished that people hadn’t reported faces on the ceiling. I just didn’t believe that there were other beings in my living room.”<sup>427</sup> She also knew, though, that reducing the visions to effects of group hypnosis wouldn’t suffice; while that explanation nicely absolved everyone of responsibility for whatever lies they might be telling themselves, it said little of the therapeutic and creative possibilities that accompanied them. Still, the latter argument was too pat a way out for Jane, since the experiences “purported to be something else, of course.”<sup>428</sup> Finally, unable to conceptualize any of them and not willing to swallow Seth’s

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<sup>423</sup> AC, 4.

<sup>424</sup> AC, 4-5.

<sup>425</sup> AC, 6.

<sup>426</sup> AC, 7.

<sup>427</sup> AC, 10.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

ideas whole, “those events seemed so intellectually disrespectful to me that I put the class notes aside, unable to grapple with their implications.”<sup>429</sup>

The cognitive dissonance is neither ridiculous nor inconsistent. Remember that Jane had been more than something of a good empiricist in ditching science and in letting Seth take a stab at the questions haunting her through him. It was only after years of strongly feeling a palpable continuity between her own awareness and another one and so many verifications of what she’d seen clairvoyantly or in out-of-body trips that she decided that sentience somehow precedes matter and cognizes nonsensory data when it manages to delink again from the body, and she’d since gone no further than these claims about consciousness. Sure, she’d split off what she claimed was knowledge from the tacit, unexamined belief she had in Seth and the purported realities he described (especially his version of reincarnation), yet she was at the same time working with and on the notion of experience she’d inherited from our times, and it didn’t quite fit with the older (pre-post-) modernity of the game of faith-and-science. If it happened to her or went down, it counted and could be thought—whatever it was, no matter who or what had the experience or did the thinking. (It remains to be seen whether reading William James helped her arrive at that position.) And that thinking wasn’t going to be helped along by faith in theological propositions, especially if they gave her little purchase on figuring out what was happening to her, and how to let it further stretch and break the bounds of the possible. But she was also waking up to the fact that understanding those experiences would require more hard thinking. “I was still trying to relate my experiences to a framework too small to contain them,” she said in retrospect. “I was scrutinizing Seth from the point of view of True and False.”<sup>430</sup> Being halfway between *doxa* and *episteme* (but who isn’t always wavering there, rendering the distinction impossible?), it wasn’t a bad characterization of her situation, especially when she fleshed it out and put it together with some insight into the politics of truth. “A lie, after all, is an untruth,” she broke it down, “something that didn’t happen in the moral world of facts. So, by implication almost, there’s a moral connotation connected when we see something others don’t see: Someone must be lying.”<sup>431</sup>

Since she was still far away from applying those thoughts to her own situation, she kept getting perturbed when her experiences went too far . . . Class members began to briefly channel what they believed were past-life personalities, even pitting them against each other in spontaneous, only half-controlled dramatizations that perhaps “acted out” conflicts from some lost time. A woman in one class spontaneously calls a man an “Indian” and accuses him of murdering her pioneer family before he reminds her that she killed her own husband in an act of rage just before he and his tribe descended on them; some weeks later, Rob becomes uncharacteristically angry at Sue, accusing her of smashing and destroying “the tablets”—those belonging, it turns out, to the ancient Essene community at which his other self is high priest—while she regresses into a vital, hyper-sexual teenage persona (“a little slut of a child,” Jane observes, “and bright enough to know it”), furiously explains that this was pay-back for his calling her out as a whore in front of a class of initiates, then snaps out of it just as Rob does, both parties claiming or pretending not to have been present to the show just put on; a member of a creative writing group Jane is leading for a few of her class members starts channeling at her typewriter a repressed Victorian woman, the resultant

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> AC, 11.

<sup>431</sup> AC, 10.

prose far exceeding anything she or the group believe her to be consciously capable of.<sup>432</sup> The visions continue too, in and out of class, with Sue feeling and seeing her arms and legs become gigantic as she lays down to sleep one night, alien thoughts about the “fantastic” qualities of the “amazing machines” that bodies are slipping into her mind, another student hallucinating three-dimensional pyramid-shapes in her living room, Jane finding herself looking out from the eyes of Rob’s portrait of Seth, and the guy that played Crusader participating in a vision-experiment of Jane’s, then vividly-but-not coming-to in an expanse of empty space before falling down into the open petals of a gigantic flower whose “inside expanded so that it seemed bottomless. . .”<sup>433</sup>

The “reincarnational dramas,” as she started to call them, set off her alarms again. How literally could she take any of them? She shifted vantages, scrutinizing things from each angle. The sociopsychic dimensions of the situations were obvious to her, and cast doubt over them . . . Her student’s performance of an American Indian was too strained, “cracked in a funny fashion, as if somebody was trying to hard, but with the best of intentions.”<sup>434</sup> The “psychological duplicity” and “grotesqueness” of it all, the fact it seemed devoid of the forceful presence she sensed when Seth came through suggested that these situations did little more than dramatize the group’s “withheld aggressive energy,” releasing to the actors their own lost, unconscious drives.<sup>435</sup> She even basically considered how the same bonds of identification that psychoanalysts and hypnotists alike see as necessary to the latter’s therapies might have been in play—noting the similarities of the builds and faces of some of the players, she wondered if these had “brought about an instant sympathy and understanding” between them that was then taken as a more ancient, timeless tie than those of psychoanalysis’ unconscious . . .<sup>436</sup> Yet she wasn’t discounting all the episodes. Even those that struck her as largely unreal evinced on their surface some faint shimmer of truth. “But I also suspected,” she reflected, “that [this] validity might straddle our concepts,” lie between and on their sides.<sup>437</sup> Especially those Spiritualism and the occult offered; though she sometimes took these up politely, she mostly railed against them. Her kinder evaluations of them—“I felt that reincarnation was something far more significant than usually supposed, and that by accepting it . . . we prevent ourselves from discovering its ‘real’ meaning”—came less often than her griping characterizations of them as dogmas “as limiting as any more conventional church dogma” and childish, “hampering” ways of conceiving the psyche’s blurred edges.<sup>438</sup> “Those who accepted Seth and my experience often did so through a structure of reference that literally drove me up a wall.”<sup>439</sup> She hated it when they told her Seth was her and their own (spirit) guide to a cosmos governed by a karma that damned them to cycles of punishment and reincarnation. And to her “horrified amazement,” readers of *The Seth Material* sent her tomes of “rigid,” pseudo-Gnostic occult literature describing ascending hierarchies of regions of being lorded over by ancient gods, while other letters declared her a “goddess” or chided her for irresponsibly teaching an unsuspecting public of spiritual ingénues to open a Pandora’s box of demonic beings. Things came to a head when

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<sup>432</sup> AC, 44. See also chapters 2 and 5 generally.

<sup>433</sup> AC, 15.

<sup>434</sup> AC, 19.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> AC, 48.

<sup>437</sup> AC, 19.

<sup>438</sup> AC, 19-20.

<sup>439</sup> AC, 48.



an old, brash Spiritualist healer that conducted séances 19<sup>th</sup>-century-style came to visit her class and bragged of the teacups that whizzed through the air when the ghosts he could conjure threw them about, then stopped them with invisible hands before they could smashe into the sitters' faces. Offended by his literalism and resenting, she admitted, the challenge to her authority, she takes him on, asking him if he dares turn the lights on during sessions or instead operates, like the fraudulent mediums of yesteryear, under cover of darkness, and heaps sarcasm onto her attacks during the debate that fires up when he espouses teetotaling and the spiritual inferiority of women (that of his docile, accompanying wife included) prior to declaring that he'd managed to channel Seth during a séance and discovered that Jane was misrepresenting the phantom. What she couldn't stand, she later wrote, was "the invisible tangle of religious superstition about him,"<sup>440</sup> the degree to which his common sense had atrophied, his sexism and hatred of the body, the way he and his ilk "presuppose that the world and afterlife exist in certain, definite, known fashions . . . and ignore anything that doesn't fit,"<sup>441</sup> how he "never questioned his experience."<sup>442</sup>

All the reviled dogmas and intellectual failures she sees belonging to religion put to the side, she was still without another framework for understanding the dramas. "I kept knocking my head against mental walls..."<sup>443</sup> The last of them she runs up against only briefly and rejects just as quickly, when a class member suggests it: "One of my students in particular tells me that I'm overly concerned. If I were broad minded enough, I'd realize all the symbols mean the same thing."<sup>444</sup> But the so-called perennial philosophy won't do, either: while "there are similarities" between Seth and the spiritualists and Eastern religions, "the importance . . . lies precisely in the differences."<sup>445</sup>

"So I was in a quandary," even after having reconsidered again her options: "My skepticism was not in the validity of the spiritual world, but in the superstitious nonsense with which that reality is interpreted," and it was also still raised against "conventional psychological or scientific dogma" (that of some physicists excepted, since several had already surreptitiously consulted Seth for help with their work).<sup>446</sup> With nowhere to go for the needed conceptual framework, she started casting out broad questions again. Following another possession drama, she wonders whether "we were all ourselves again," "or were we just the selves we'd been told to think we were?"<sup>447</sup> The questions, again, were hardly trite, since she immediately resorted to a lexicon—and soon another inventive sequence of thought—that might allow her to start answering them. Condensing all her dissatisfaction into one line, she declares that very few people who play with altered consciousness and meditation "wonder what they suggest about the nature of being . . .

Even from the beginning, I felt that my experience could lead me toward a concept of being that could untangle religious and psychic experience from superstition, and literally free our consciousness . . .<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> AC, 26.

<sup>441</sup> AC, 28.

<sup>442</sup> AC, 32.

<sup>443</sup> AC, 20.

<sup>444</sup> AC, 34.

<sup>445</sup> AC, 34-35.

<sup>446</sup> AC, 34.

<sup>447</sup> AC, 31.

<sup>448</sup> AC, 33.

Jane decided then—inchoately and hesitantly, according to her account of that time—that for all her independence and mystical trust, she had succumbed for too long to reason’s demand to be turned against the self, so that the feeling and intuitions that surfaced there could be subjected to the cold distrust that would supposedly guarantee her a critical edge. “I would insist on allowing myself psychic and intuitive freedom,” she said of that time, “while using my intellect to criticize the results...”<sup>449</sup> “the more doubts I had, the more intelligent and critical and balanced I thought I was.”<sup>450</sup> Getting anywhere would require proceeding differently.

#### RIPPING THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE

Maybe it was easier to deal with her own visions than the channeling dramas of her classes. There was less to doubt and more to go on, and even if they were more enigmatic, it was difficult to chalk them up to anything—they came seemingly from nowhere, without either hypnosis or the psychedelics it would have been reasonable to expect were behind them triggering or aiding them, and they abandoned robust and precise meaning to the words they would leave trailing far behind them. Which is also perhaps why right after deciding that only a “new concept of being” would allow her to approach her longstanding questions, she immediately opposes the “private,” “original vision” offered by the other psyche to the threadbare concepts and “mass ideas” into which the age demands they be compressed by threatening penalties of marginality and fraudulence for non-compliance.<sup>451</sup> Whatever her reasoning or the way she suspended it, her account of the next months suggests that she stilled her mind and simply let herself see whatever was projected from it.

Those light shows came steadily, trumping their antecedents with ever more volatile images, their constant fluctuations and metamorphoses increasing the uncertainty of whatever sense they might have conveyed. It began with a skeleton. While Jane was canvassing her students for stories of the visions they’d encountered after Seth led them to an encounter with some of their other selves, her awareness frayed as she became cognizant of an unusual sensation spreading up her right arm; it felt like mere bone, her hand a tense claw. The feeling encompassed her body until she knew that looking at it would only return the image of a clothed skeleton, whose sockets she now gazed from.

A calm detachment and understanding quickly vanquished a momentary sense of nostalgia: I had left this physical room and this reality long ago, and so had my students. I sat inside a skeleton, in a rocking chair, addressing other skeletons that sat on chairs and couches in a room that itself had long since disappeared. So, I knew, had the town and civilization in which it had its being. All of this, the class and students, had happened millions of years in the past. Even the skeleton images, that now seemed the only right ones, were only mirages. Yet I wasn’t sad, or even curious. Only the sense of vast distances briefly held my attention. So with a strange new courtesy, I continued to address my questions to those in the room.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> AC, 11.

<sup>450</sup> AC, 33.

<sup>451</sup> AC, 34.

<sup>452</sup> AC, 31.

Both the dissolving scene and this feeling, from the farthest edge of discourse, of almost uncrossable distance and age solicited little protest from her, as if she realized that doubt was a tool that would only bend in on itself if scraped across their surfaces.

The next seeing came upon her a few months later, as she fell idle after a spell of work in her writing studio and began gazing from its window at the thick foliage of an old oak tree that dangled just past its pane, filling the view with the dense mosaic of greens that began right then notifying her of the thick sentence of their life.

Something began to happen. I felt as if the leaves and I were changing places. I'd feel all sunny and warm and loose, hanging out there; and from a leaf's standpoint I'd see myself through the other side of the open windows, sitting at the table. I knew, inside the leaf, what I looked like, but the leaf perceived my pattern, identifying it according to shape and shadow. This happened time and time again.<sup>453</sup>

The experience's repetition brought to the same her that it was bearing away another sense of the world:

The quality of my perception was deepening in some new way. The dimensions of the present moment opened up; so that in any given instant, the normal backyard scene with its trees, lawns, and gardens suddenly came into a new, spectacular life; a life that had been there all the time, but with which I was just becoming acquainted. Some of the most joyous hours of my adult life began.<sup>454</sup>

With them came a calm but steady torrent of creativity, which led her to initiate the autobiographical half of the book in which all this was recounted, to continue the relentless, heavy work of the questioning that everything but these serene visions was subjected to, and to intensify the many hours she spent writing, channeling, and teaching each day.

Dreaming awake no longer frightened her. She would ease into the raptures when they started up and her body slipped away, participate in them by moving through and even adding images to the scenes. It was as though the strength that allowed her to embrace and withstand what occurred and the passivity that allowed for its unfurling combined into a balance that then set in motion an event that cascaded out of itself and back to her, saturating her life so that she swelled and grew beyond herself and toward the other being she would have strained like an infant to be if she could only see further, to the future awaiting and encouraging that arrival. Though she had what still amounted to only a vague, inchoate cognizance of that circuit and her place in it, it was enough to keep her from being surprised when the force gliding through its turns came back to her, bathing her until her skin pruned and split as the half-formed body coming from below it broke through and congealed—before absorbing into its pores the layers of itself just shed.

So wonder came with her next vision and the process of metamorphosis it seemed to entail, but none of the harsh shock from years past. She was sitting inside the apartment with some women in her creative writing class, leading them through an exercise of the imagination aimed at dampening their internal censors. “Immediately”—the way the visions

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<sup>453</sup> *AC*, 49.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*

commence and end, abruptly and without announcing their arrival—"I found myself outside my the large bay window. A tightrope stretched from our house to the house next door. I was dressed like a clown, with big floppy pants, and walking the rope high in the air. Then I let myself fall, and go gently rolling down."<sup>455</sup> She decided to "fall upward" too, and found herself flying that direction, a "wind in an updraft," before playing around some more.<sup>456</sup> Part of her awareness, she explains, was still with her body while the rest of her was outside, so she opens her eyes to see if her students are still meditating. Satisfied that they're busy, she projects this last remnant of herself outside the window and then loses all contact with her body.

At first, everything looked normal. I saw the usual curved horizon over and beyond the house and the afternoon sky, all swirling now with gray clouds that rushed past the dimmed yellow sun. I noticed this particularly because the day had been sunny when class began. Then suddenly, the three-dimensional world behind the other house just folded up flat behind it, so that the whole thing was two-dimensional – like a flat piece of cardboard, with the house just painted on the front. At the same time, I shot through the whole flat surface, ripping through to the other side.

Here, to my considerable amazement, was another universe—or at least what looked like one. Velvet black space stretched as far as I could see, with pinpoint stars at an unimaginable distance. I was obviously headed in one particular direction, and I went hurtling onward . . . This seemed to take a very long time. I had no body, but seemed to be just a point of light moving at incredible speed. This wasn't a mental image; the space all about me had dizzying depths. Suddenly I slowed down and lost altitude. Very gently, I felt myself drifting lower. The next thing I remember is a glimpse of quite ordinary autumn trees. Then seemingly and without transition, I was sitting on the ground in front of my childhood home.<sup>457</sup>

She realizes that she is herself again, but now as the pudgy child she was when two or three years old. She is nowhere else but in that body, seeing from its eye-level and toddling and falling as it while it learns to walk—its emotions and thoughts her own, hers now mostly gone.

It took me a moment to get my bearings: I was definitely looking out through the child's eyes. *Beyond doubt, the child was me.* I stood up, unsteadily, but with great enjoyment and the most delicious sense of accomplishment. Then I realized that I was just learning to walk...<sup>458</sup>

After a long scene in which she moves about the yard with a child's prowess and abandon, she find herself—"again without transition"<sup>459</sup>—back in the apartment.

"I was certainly disoriented for a moment," she said of coming back. "The transition between child body and adult body was really startling. I'd felt such a marvelous

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<sup>455</sup> AC, 51.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> AC, 52.

<sup>458</sup> AC, 53.

<sup>459</sup> AC, 52.

compactness and corporeal intensity. Now I felt tell and gawky.”<sup>460</sup>

#### GLOSSOLALIA-THOUGHT

What concept or thought could have accounted for these visions? That “Seth” talked and made sense meant that he was some kind of person, even a faked one, and Jane’s simultaneity with him meant that there was a paradox concerning identity to be thought. But whatever self persisted in the visions could hardly be expressed with words or skew logic into a graspable contradiction with itself (“I felt as if the leaves and I were changing places...”) with the situation for the “consciousness” that somehow experienced them being even worse, since it was now “exploding” into bits and pieces that somehow experienced themselves disparately together before dissipating again. The most Jane could say was that these scenes were “upthrusts” of creativity, “new possibilities for action and fulfillment just beneath the surface.”<sup>461</sup> Some kind of “rebirth.”<sup>462</sup>

A commentary, however, was initiated about the visions, and this time it came from elsewhere, no Jane, nothing helping, and in a language that was, in its unyieldingly strange manner, entirely appropriate. It happened a few months later, after the visions had subsided. Jane was beginning a class when she noticed her attention being drawn again to the spot on the neighboring house where the universe had torn open.

“Suddenly,” she said, “I had the impression that a group of people were coming out of that ‘other universe’ into the room, and that their teacher stood just inside, facing me.”<sup>463</sup> She could feel them, right at the threshold of consciousness, communicating something to her, although she “couldn’t pick up what was being said.”<sup>464</sup> They were moving around the room, getting in place for something.

“I ‘heard’ a babble of voices in strange languages. These seemed to come from far above me. This wasn’t physical hearing. Instead, I had the impression of multitudinous sounds stacked in layers. I saw the sounds, in other words, as shapes: some formed triangles, and some long rectangles. I sensed them as forms *and* sounds. They were all alien. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do with them, but I knew something was expected of me.”<sup>465</sup>

So even while there seemed to be no way the cacophony could be let in—“it would be impossible, I thought, for anyone to give voice to that” since “I didn’t feel that my tongue could make the sounds required”<sup>466</sup>—she felt its clamor, though it was no threat, as a loud, persistent demand for passage, as if she was “supposed. . . to just open up and let them come through.”<sup>467</sup> The sounds, still inchoate, began congealing into something like words, bunches of them swarming, it seemed, into entire languages. Those tongues, however, begin to recede away as quickly as they had came, until just one blared out against the fresh silence in her head, its parawords coursing through it with such speed that there was no way to tell where they began or ended. Yet she was still resisting them, canny despite the intrusion; the locks would stay closed. “I’d be damned,” she said, rather than let happen what she felt

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> AC, 59

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> AC, 60.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

coming, the “speaking in tongues” she associated with “fundamentalist religions.”<sup>468</sup> “If any yelling, contortions, or tremors—holy or otherwise—were going to be involved, then I was drawing the line.”<sup>469</sup>

But then, once again—its insistent repetition a veritable problem, both for her and us—the turning- or tipping-point, when she makes a decision to give up for a time her power of decision. The internal volume turns down again, this time all the potential words fading “to dim static”<sup>470</sup> and leaving one of their number behind. It leaps in size, crystallizes as a phonetic pattern, and repeats itself, a fragment of song, in her mind: *Sumari, Sumari, Sumari, Sumari*. “I was intrigued,” and so, a writer’s means of self-control asserting itself (seduction being a matter of cajoling the will to consent instead of resist), “I decided to write the word down, rather than speak or sing it.”<sup>471</sup> It was followed by others, each one leaping out indistinct from the background and congealing into a cryptic word. Tranced out now, passed out, her hand scribbles away, the words flowing through what was always for her, by her telling, the safest means of expression....

...When she comes to again, her attention goes back to the class. She tells them what has happened, and chooses, in this instant of regained self-possession, to let go again, so that the pseudo-words just written can be sung aloud. Gone once more, and this time quite far away, her students later tell her she “chanted the words in a loud, ringing voice, flinging the paper to the floor.”<sup>472</sup> Glossolalia ensues: “*Sumari, Ispania, Wena nafarie, Dena dena nefarie, Lona, Lona, Lona, Sumari*” goes the first song, and others like it follow, everyone “switching over” during them to other states of consciousness.<sup>473</sup> Some have visions: someone sees a luminescent silhouette standing behind Jane, others sees glowing figures in the room, Rob, working alone in his studio at the same time, sees “a head shape, bathed in beautiful colorful jagged outline”—“brilliant, almost like fire,” it had “shoots of light” coming from its sides—while Jane sees the other selves, from other times, of nearly everyone there. And as the syllabic jumble continued to course through (“*Enaji o J tumba/Reset il a baragey/So tem responde/sol tu detum*”), Jane writes, “a delicious warmth filled my body. . . like a glow, from inside, radiating outward... an astonishing graciousness, a delightful ancient-yet-young joy that was directed toward everyone in the room.”<sup>474</sup>

Vision, light, group ecstasy, warmth, *pneuma*: Hardly, at least when dressed in lowbrow religious form, the stuff of the concept, the entire development seems destined to derail Jane from reaching anything in the neighborhood of an answer or response. And doubly so, since she’s now spouting almost straight nonsense, or at least the kind typical of glossolalia.

Jane, however, thought that she’d found her way back to the trail. “It’s almost as if I had been born into a different civilization of myself, a new self-land.”<sup>475</sup> The glossolalia’s start coincided with an uprush of energy from her psyche and into her waking life, which resolved there a series of problems. Some of the tension, first of all, between science and religion that was so interfering with her mind began to go slack. Although her Seth persona,

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> AC, 60.

<sup>472</sup> AC, 61.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> AC, 68.

“intellectually freer” than her, “brilliantly expounded theories I needed as an individual,” he never expressed the “feminine qualities” that also belonged to her psyche, and which the glossoliac language was capable of releasing.<sup>476</sup> There were emotions, “feelings largely unconscious” said Seth, that she had not yet figured out how to allow free reign in her life.<sup>477</sup> But Sumari, precisely because it was, as Seth was to explain, “a logically unstructured vehicle,” could express feelings and thoughts normally excluded from the ossified categories, “the pet phrases,” of most language—it is “a method of expanding your concepts, not of translating experience into just another but different stereotyped form that happens to be more exclusive.”<sup>478</sup> For Jane, it meant that her psyche was finally broadcasting “in stereo,”<sup>479</sup> the new anti-logical, polyvalent babble panned into the left channel, where it balanced and softened the angular chords of the intellection that continued on the right.

Which also allowed her to interpret, finally, her visions and ecstasies. The persona she often felt in her, herself becoming, when singing glossolia was like, she said, an ancient pagan priestess capable of allegorizing the mystery of the psyche within her. Where words and concepts as eccentric as hers were failing, the songs were capable of expressing it. Because their opaque syllables carried either “several layers of meaning at once” or else so many that they ended up only suggesting its possibility, they conveyed, far better than could actual words, what would have to be unintelligible about the psyche’s (and “her own”) divergently unified experience. So with that in mind, Jane suddenly began making sense of the images from her visions; instead of remaining almost completely opaque experiences, they too became recognizable as signs. She could now see that “the ‘other universe’ experience had certainly stated its case quite symbolically. Even the long chute through which I traveled could be interpreted as a journey through the womb. . . even if I don’t believe that experience to be just symbolic.”<sup>480</sup> So many of the images, she said, symbolized quite directly the “rebirth” she now felt herself to be undergoing.

And if those big studio productions of her psyche could now be viewed as allegories for feelings come from a psyche that no proper concept could at any rate really express, she could, finally, at least generalize about their significance for the here-and-now. “Successful living results,” she wrote in light of what had happened, “from a series of psychological births over the period of a lifetime, in which

the psyche infuses the personality with new energy, insight, and direction, in response to the physical situation and the personality’s needs. In mundane terms, the result might be a sudden burst of health, the development of latent abilities, or the resolution of problems that before seemed insoluble.

Dreams, inspirations, and visions of one kind or another are, I believe, an important part of this process. Through them, the unconscious makes its material consciously available. Unfortunately . . . we’re taught to interpret revelations . . . according to prescribed dogma—religious, scientific, or psychological.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> AC, 77.

<sup>477</sup> AC, 78.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> AC, 77.

<sup>480</sup> AC, 67.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

Her glossolalia or “Sumari” experience, itself such a revelation and rebirth, had brought her closer to understanding how the psyche might finally slip out from the pincers of science and religion. Distancing itself further, on the one hand, from the Freudian unconscious, her other psyche, because it so effectively expressed itself by means of (limit-) phenomena far outside those psychoanalysis or most related therapies consider workable (Jung alone could have worked with and learned from its concatenation of mediumship, ecstasy, visions, glossalia, and religious ideation while refraining from reducing it to mild or barely-contained psychosis), really no longer needed to be considered an unconscious of any familiar sort, and could even pick up the slack psychoanalysis let out when encountering its greatest avowed difficulty. “It’s at least possible,” thought Jane, “that schizophrenia is a condition resulting when an individual is in the middle of psychological rebirth, but unable to interpret his or her experiences within current frameworks. What we might need is a psychological midwife: someone to decode visions and revelations . . .”<sup>482</sup> At the same time, this other consciousness-unconsciousness bringing about those transformations not ending in schizophrenic abortion required, because and not despite of its “spiritual” nature, modes of interpretation flexible enough to break and reformulate their own (religious) limits. “More and more I’m convinced,” she continues, “that the soul or psyche, going into itself, finds the source of itself, uncovers its meanings, and translates these into art forms, religious and scientific frameworks.”<sup>483</sup> Species, civilizations, individuals all find this way the wellspring of their existence within their strange insides, but when the interpretive forms they get from plugging into and then “translating” it ossify, so that they no longer reflect its vital mobility, the cracks have to be hammered into breaks, until the structures cave on themselves.<sup>484</sup> “I believe,” she concluded, “that when the exterior conceptual framework no longer reflects . . . psychic knowledge, it will be thrown off. Man returns to his visions and revelations, knowing instinctively that only the psyche’s rich creativity can bring about new insights that will in their time coalesce into more meaningful organization.”<sup>485</sup> The ultimately inexhaustible mobility of the psyche, then, requires that thinking, art, and life mutate as much as they can, and never project immutability upon whatever gods or God lie on the hither side of themselves. “Old gods,” in fact, “fade away, and others take their places.”<sup>486</sup>

Finding the means, which she called her “trance language,” for articulating a change so relentless that it eludes expression in anything that could properly be dubbed language was what allowed her, then, to further cast off science and religion. The propensity for change Seth had already attributed to the psyche—“the universe’s need . . . to form,” he now clarified, “into ever-changing patterns,” a need that “can never be fully expressed”<sup>487</sup>—was exactly what she was able to feel and convey via her glossolalia, precisely because such speech, as Seth explained, was itself like an alphabet as changing and unstable as his world. Hearing that flux made her quite sure that no religious understanding could predetermine or hold a monopoly on deciphering what the psyche would say through and as us. “It must,” when it can no longer be heard, “throw off old outworn garments,” like the spiritualism and Christianity she was rejecting, for more supple forms and interpretations. As for science, while Freud & Co. might have understood that the real psychic scene was elsewhere than

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<sup>482</sup> AC, 67.

<sup>483</sup> AC, 76.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> AC, 80.



consciousness, they failed to understand that “intrusions” from this “alien area” were not limited to subverting the self, but were more likely, if attended to, to cause it to undergo rebirth and transformation. But assisting the psyche in such regeneration would require psychoanalysis to work with the mythopoeitic symbols that emerged from it, since it was these, and not its more conventional expressions, which could allegorize what in it would always remain beyond words. “A man thinks he’s speaking for Christ, for example, or receives automatic writing from a being on another planet—in the recognized true or false world, such experiences just don’t fit.”<sup>488</sup> Working with such “unconscious materials,” however, by remembering that “their reality exists in a different order of events” irreducible to the phenomenal world and in need of “being correlated with it,” would allow for the deliverance (for connecting with “another,” metaphoric, “planet of the psyche”).<sup>489</sup> And the successful correlation will only take place if the message, again, is seen as so supple as to be unamenable to all but the most mobile interpretations, those that won’t betray or distort the flux on the other side. Neither science nor religion had them ...

But could that have been it? If that was all the most recent developments had taught her, Jane will already be way down in a game that has hardly started. Punchdrunk and already on the ropes, frankly, since what she has so far offered only partially amounts to an advance: Jane may have felt the high tension in her between religion and science entering détente, but she was still pinballing between them, having hammered into her head upon each collision more of their old ideologies, and this was something of a regression. For even though she had just, through Seth (through her), toppled from underneath it many of the supports that keep the two-worlds structure in place, she was nonetheless now propping them back up, calling the psyche an originary “Source,” allegorizing it in a vulgar, classical fashion, getting amnesiac, even, about its being shaped and changed by a reality that is looking again to be far below it (she remembers again shortly, and we’ll consider the consequences). As if she had gone back to a barely-inverted Platonism for the masses, which this time wasn’t stripping out of its starched religious Sunday best to publically flaunt some flesh, but wearing as couture some yesteryear Protestant fashions: a concept of rebirth, second birth, regeneration, and new life, first off, all basically conceived, second, as a gift one never oneself gives. A mobile becoming psyche instead of God, sure, but an inexpressible mystery nonetheless, one alone sayable through a babble triggered only by grace of an outpouring of its spirit.

Getting drunk on it also perhaps distracted her from her basic questions about the self. Asked after her second birth in vision and glossolalia, “What are the metaphysics of the unconscious?”<sup>490</sup> was the latest, but the fact that the answers were coming in secret, divine code caused her to lose the thread connecting them to those (“were we just,” again, “the selves we’d been told to think we were?”) concerning the big paradox of her trances, and everything about it that upset Christianity, modernity, and their intersection. She was, as has been repeatedly seen, both herself and another during her ecstasies, while also, despite the situation apparently being inherently detrimental to consciousness, quite cognizant of this as it was happening. And since she was capable, as happened with the glossalia, of deciding to go into and out of such states of self-other-consciousness (what else can they be called...?), then self, in its very basics, had become radically out and ambiguous. But now that the

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<sup>488</sup> *AC*, 68.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> *AC*, 68.

tension sustaining the paradox was plummeting as the ego was getting figured as only a subsidiary effect of a spiritual unconscious, Jane was slipping, forgetting that her foe “science,” which increasingly meant psychoanalysis, had quite diligently attended to the paradoxes raised by the possibility of the unconscious. So that she rebounded straight back to the quite safe spiritual ground that (as) Seth (she) usually discouraged her (self) from occupying, leaving behind in the process what could once again seem like a half-serious, merely quixotic desire for a “new concept of being.”

“I FELT MYSELF... FEEL A PART OF EVERYTHING I SAW”

The difficult questions, however, would soon come enter the frame again, and with them the responses that keep compelling us to tune into Jane’s frequency. For now, she was sure of one thing: the reup had been necessary. Even if it caused her to take a temporary hiatus from thinking, the glossoalia had forced her to realize that every thought worth the name has a side barely expressible in even poetic or symbolic language. She could stop making sense of something that was often without it.

Yet even though she hadn’t yet seized upon it, the seeds for an answer were presenting themselves right from within the glossoalia itself. It wasn’t just what she had to say, as Seth, about how the special plasticity of the “language” allowed it to express what was normally lost to speech. According to him, the syllables belonged to an “alphabet” that is unique because in constant variation. Unlike the phonemes of language, which “do not change,” since in that event “you would find them relatively useless,” those of Sumari involve such “spontaneity” and “motion” that “meaning is allowed to rise and fall” where usually it does not and cannot.<sup>491</sup> Instead of taking, as does language, “a small aspect” of the multitudinous, changing “groups of relationships” between things, then “freezing” and “transposing these upon ‘reality’” until “perception is held within well-defined limits,” the elements of the glossoaliac alphabet perpetually change, so as to match and convey all the fluctuating relations making up the real.<sup>492</sup> What sounds like deformed nonsense is in fact a patterning of such suppleness that it morphs continually, so that “acknowledged recognized reality” can be seen to be really made of constantly “emerging relationships.”<sup>493</sup> Being able to say or think them “allows the perceiver to face experience more closely” and “open up greater varieties of it.”<sup>494</sup> “Once you think of a ‘tree’ as a tree,” for example, “it takes great effort to see it freshly again,” as “a living individual” that varies with, is perhaps in essence indissociable from its relations; yet the relentless “change” of the Sumari alphabet can reach “those ever-changing patterns,” allowing them to rise to perception.<sup>495</sup>

There was still more, and it was the incisive part. Seth at this point added little about the glossoalia; while what he had said had been suggestive, it left unaddressed what the character of the real could at bottom be if it basically consists of conglomerations of terms whose nature changes as their relations do. Could there be, in that case, individual beings or selves beneath and prior to their relations? And if so, do they really come first? Such questions, even if they had not yet been made manifest for Jane, seem to have lurked in her mind’s shadows as she contended with Sumari through other channels. Thought being

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<sup>491</sup> AC, 78-79.

<sup>492</sup> AC, 79.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> AC, 79.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

irresistible, she had been busy, herself now, analyzing what for her was the hidden grammar of the language. Comparing the songs to the English translations she would produce after their delivery, she noticed that, in the Sumari-language, “words or names change according to their relationships.”<sup>496</sup>

In a poem translated as “Song of the Pear Tree,” for instance, the name for the ostensible subject of both the entire song and some of its lines changes as its relations do.\* In the first line—“*Tul a frumage*,” or “the pear tree grows”—*tul*, Jane says, signifies a pear tree, even though further on, a different set of words, “*Le lo terume*,” does the same work.<sup>497</sup> This is because, she explains, there is no pear tree *as such*. While *tul* does somehow mean “pear tree” in the sense of “a member of a class... of other fruit-bearing trees,” the so-called pear tree is never signified in such a fashion, as if it could be separated from whatever it is related to, which here is *frumage*, or “harvesting earth-self” (so that the line could also be translated “pear tree-harvesting-earth-self”).<sup>498</sup> Therefore the tree, she continues, is primarily an element and phase of a process involving other terms and not a distinct grammatical subject or object. The point is again made with “*Le lo terume*,” the process, namely, of “earth growing itself into a tree and becoming standing-earth-with-pear-faces” (the thought being so cumbersome, she translates it as “the pear tree stands,” noting the inadequacy).<sup>499</sup> While her remarks here are brief, they leave little doubt that Jane was beginning to understand, precisely because of her glossoalia, an entity, if that would even be the appropriate term, not as an individual capable of preceding or standing outside relations it would then hold with other such individuals but as a conjuncture of individuals together constituting (but not undergoing) a process—one, moreover, possibly not at all involving activity and passivity or grammatical subject and objects.

After briefly again saying as much—“the word for something is different according to the aspects... being considered, its relationships”<sup>500</sup>—she reaps the consequences. “In Sumari, object words—nouns—often disappear into verbs.”<sup>501</sup> As if the real was somehow composed of the processes verbs express well before it is of the subjects, grammatical or personal, supposed to precede and carry them as predicates (if, that is, the real has subjects, in any familiar sense, at all); as if she was beginning to understand, moreover, that moving through the problems that had for so long bothered her about what the self was—what hers

<sup>496</sup> AC, 71.

\* “*Tul a frumage/Splendor a traum/Deliniage betum/Ignor te a dues/Grim a frundi* [The pear tree grows/From the sweet pits/Of your feeling,/Sunken in the secret grounds of your being]/*Glow in a tua/Sev er indo/Tel r/Tel e o/E nater um* [It grows in the silence/Of atom and evening/It grows in the knowledge/Of your unknowing/And blossoms in the clear/Air of morning]; *Le lo terume/Le lay terum a/Silva en a durum/Mag dur in e a/Maro* [The pear tree stands/Dazzling and glowing,/The fruit of your love/Made living From the orchard of feeling,]/*Gr pa deja nor/La ne sev silnor/De naje or day ney* [From the orchard of feeling, The atom’s love,/Multiplied]; *Deja a bonde/Sevra nev andu/Ignor ra france* [Each leaf sings your praises/The air is your breath/Through which each leaf dances]/*Le a ray vetum/Taj ja na more/Splen de a moribus/Grundi. Mespania* [As your love climbs/The steps of your spine/And blossoms in syllables/And images,]/*O ne a fra bundi/Meo* [So your love flows, invisible,/Outside the windows/And rushes up hollow paths/Of air]; *Say ja dor remi/Vem erage soldi nesta/Gromage teri tom to a/Is panita tor tertium* [Your love charms the trees/Into growing/And carves living plants/Out of unknowing]/*Sta veri ende/O nana par ser en dra/Ilina tor resteri/Teratum is ner o onta* [The pear tree and all trees/Grow/From the trance of your love].” AC, 71-72.

<sup>497</sup> AC, 72.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> AC, 71.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

was, when it stayed awake while displaced, merged with “Seth’s,” consciously exploded into thousands of dazzling shards—would require forgetting what language normally makes it out to be, so that it could be conceived altogether differently, as more passage than pause; as if suddenly, in a flash, she understood all this.

A more precise understanding, however, remained for now off-stage. “I felt myself in a world,” she wrote of that time, “where words had no application,” and “I’d ... feel a part of everything I saw.”<sup>502</sup> Yet she remained finally unsure of what to make of these feelings of continuity and the uselessness of trying to express them in language. She needed something else. “I could feel that odd stirring... more was on its way.”<sup>503</sup>

What did come intensified the situation, while at the same time setting up the conditions for answers to her latest round of questions. The seasons turning again, another ecstasy comes over her. Editing with Rob on a cold night the galleys proofs for the first of Seth’s own books (*Seth Speaks*), she notices “the oddest sensation,” perhaps an altered mood.<sup>504</sup> Recognizing this as a signal that a threshold is being crossed, she lets the movement begin, cognizant that she will later find in its gap some answers. The cats stir then move toward her, she walks to the apartment window and looks outside.

“Instantly,” she wrote of what came next, “I became transfixed. I saw the corner intersection below with a clarity literally astounding to me at the time, as if I’d never seen it or any other corner in my whole life. The entire scene was endowed with a rushing vitality impossible to describe.

I could hardly take my eyes off the sight, and I could hardly speak... For four hours, such an ecstasy filled me that *I was lost in the scene below*: the few inches of snow, the car lights swooping through the darkness: the exquisite private shadows all endowed with a superlife that evades all words.

My stomach swooped as each car went over the very small rise in the road just below the traffic light; I never even realized there was a rise there before. I cried out with unabashed joy many times, caught in a surprise by a new shadow or the sudden motion of a telephone wire. I’d never seen such colors except twice in out-of-body states. It seemed as if the world had been flat before. Now colors had hills and valleys and depths and distances inside themselves. The field across the street bristled; the snow was like a live sponge, responsive to everything. When headlights swept across this living snow, I could hardly bear it. As cars passed, I was aware of some positive relationship between each of them—elastic, I think—and I felt the air changes that happened between one car and another; the abrupt yet perfect alterations in all this as one car turned; and the oneness of this motion with all the other motion simultaneously occurring.<sup>505</sup>

Trying to describe herself, the scene to Rob, the best that can be mustered are gasps and cries. “It was impossible for me....words were so inadequate that I should have been terribly frustrated.”<sup>506</sup> Only a poem, written later and in a far more muted state of inspiration, could

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<sup>502</sup> AC, 84.

<sup>503</sup> AC, 80.

<sup>504</sup> AC, 81.

<sup>505</sup> AC, 82.

<sup>506</sup> AC, 83.

convey what happened. She helped it focus itself on the most forceful point of the experience, which “involved a piece of crumpled newspaper that kept blowing in the wind. I was kinetically a part of its flights...”<sup>507</sup>

She was it, it was her, they were between each other. The conjunctures, each time, were wiping any distinct her out, threatening to do so absolutely (“If that paper moves again,” reads the poem, “I think I’ll die... take leave of all my sense”<sup>508</sup>), and language could not really capture them. Yet she remained there through all of it, the one feeling as herself other things moving, the air pressure between them, the light reflecting off them into her eyes, and the “oneness” of all those forces (“the oneness of this motion with all the other motion simultaneously occurring”).<sup>509</sup> Unless this was the most ordinary language reintroducing her into a burst-open place where she was not and insinuating itself where it was “basically meaningless,” there was an ‘I’ exactly where there wasn’t one, and couldn’t be. Someone had to be there, even if someone wasn’t, since in the days that followed, Jane said, “I’d suddenly see the world in this surreal fashion, and feel a part of everything I saw.”<sup>510</sup> Who was it that had the feeling?

No immediate answers, but Jane “felt regenerated,” and woke up some days later feeling that “she’d had a terrific dream, filled with some kind of new creativity” that nonetheless eluded recall. The ecstasy was unleashing, as she had thought it would, yet another psychic torrent (“the experience would splash over to other areas of my life...”).<sup>511</sup> This one was a novel that began pouring itself through her, and that felt as if it was being written by some of its characters. The story, no surprise, was about a psyche, a soul and its incarnations: one of them, a spirit-teacher like Seth but an ingénue, guides his mortal counterparts in their dreams while being supervised by a more experienced instructor. The familiar Jane-process applied to its production: the first lines “just came, seemingly from nowhere,” and were followed by four chapters in three days, the material coming “as quickly as [she] could write it down” and in “simple yet lucid” prose which resisted “any attempt to tamper with it” and organized itself in “seamless” fashion.<sup>512</sup> Then the process becomes surprising, the plot not only turning in ways that shock her, but “whole chapters coming in the dream state” and out-of-order, and the protagonist, “Seven,” becomes a distinct, “beautifully immediate” reality, even turning out to be the primary author: “When I sat down to write, I’d ask him mentally, for the next chapter — and there it was...”<sup>513</sup> The novel was its own development, and was as significant for Jane as the glossolalia, opening up this new project and creative method. “I enjoyed the fullest creative and psychic freedom.”<sup>514</sup>

While she herself doesn’t yet connect the dots, certain lines are strongly implied between the glossolalia, her ecstasy in the window, and now this novel and its characters. Reaching the new point of indistinction she did, between herself and what was outside her, and finding language breaking down there into a sputter opened her further, bounds breaking so that more otherness could rush into, mix with, and form with her the wild swirl that was now casting word upon dislodged word out from the trail of wreckage it blazed

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<sup>507</sup> AC, 82.

<sup>508</sup> AC, 83.

<sup>509</sup> AC, 82.

<sup>510</sup> AC, 84.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> AC, 85.

<sup>514</sup> AC, 86.

relentlessly through the language of her psyche. What had been “she” became so disengaged from its words and grammar that there was no one there to say no to or disidentify with the nameless forces impinging from what had been the outside, and which drew a jumble of words to themselves until they concatenated into organized streams that took on the appearance of and faked an I, a he, a she, a Seven, Seth, or Jane. Yet at the same time, other lines, running perpendicular to those, look possible as well, for the torn seams of herself seem also to have been threading themselves back together, the tissue recomposing again around what could again feel like an “intrusion” even as she could, the paradox in play, call them herself, by twisting the words into “her” selves. In either case—could they be the same?—it did take, just as Seth said it would, loosening language’s grip for her to feel herself related to or mixed with others.

So that finally the real questions came. The “more” she had felt coming arrived, and things were changing with it. “Not only,” she writes, “was I speaking for Seth and delivering his books in a trance state, but I was speaking and singing and writing poetry in Sumari and translating it, and writing *Oversoul Seven*.”<sup>515</sup> Counting Seth II, the novel’s two main characters, and some alter egos not yet here introduced, “I was using at least seven separate levels of consciousness and juggling them with relative ease.”<sup>516</sup> But this posed the same problem for her persisting in the polyphony. “My sphere of operation was certainly expanding. But something had to expand in my world of concepts.”<sup>517</sup>

“My own experiences with Sumari and *Oversoul Seven* were intensifying my questions,” she explains. “Now I was concerned not only with the nature of the reality of Seth and Seth II: How real, in our terms, were Sumari, Cyprus, and Seven? Where did all these experiences fit into *any* concepts about human personality? They just didn’t, at least not to me.”<sup>518</sup> She was shifting the place she put the accent: not are they real, but *how* real—even because of what? This other question also took her further, as a little paraphrase or rephrase will show: Could these experiences, perhaps now named without the possessive because it was unclear to her who, if anyone, experienced them, actually confirm or agree with any known conception of the self? She was off...

“I don’t know how many hours I spent trying to find answers that were acceptable to me.”<sup>519</sup> They didn’t come until a few months later, when she was typing the manuscript for *Oversoul Seven* (which wrote itself in the same amount of time). “My mind was on that, not on any questions, when one night I was suddenly presented with just what I needed—a new framework, or at least the beginning of one.”<sup>520</sup> Everything sped up, “accelerated still further,” then “clicked and fell into place.”<sup>521</sup>

I saw Seth, Seth II, the Sumari, Cyprus, Seven—and myself—as aspects of *a single but multidimensional consciousness*. I wrote down what was coming to me in big excited scribbles, abbreviating words wherever I could... for some three hours.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> AC, 88.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> AC, 89.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

The excerpts she publishes from those notes announce that all “these personalities have to be considered as aspects” of one plural psyche or consciousness—hers.

And this includes my personality... from which I am viewing these other aspects of myself, through a kind of psychological window...

I travel through my psyche, using it as a window, postulating, of course, the extra I who disconnects itself from the usual I to do the traveling... I’m able to tune into these aspects better than most people, but they represent the ‘components’ of personality and the portions of our being that exist outside of our three-dimensional framework....

[The psyche] dips in and out of time and has existences in other dimensions, showering aspects of itself out in all directions. These aspects are alive, active, but latent in each of us, where their abilities help form the stuff of our personalities.<sup>523</sup>

Though this new deluge (finally) left her “dazed” and once again “full of questions,” she also felt “triumphant” amidst it: “I was on my way to some kind of theory that would make sense of my own experience.”<sup>524</sup> So that when real waters heightened then inundated the plains of New York during a storm the very next evening, it was easy to not see the river surging about them as a threat. She and Rob ignored an evacuation order and continued about their business, riding and maybe feeding off the chaos the city and its surroundings were being thrown into. While the flood flashed to ten feet and poured through the windows and doors of the apartment below, she sat sanguine and finished typing the manuscript, in uncanny, almost preternatural resonance with what was sweeping a whole town away.<sup>525</sup>

Breakthrough itself being nothing unordinary for Jane, something besides the event of which it was a part must have differentiated it for her from all those of the last year. What it was again—her words still—is that a “channel opened” and brought with it “*a body of theory*,” a “*conceptual framework*,” a “*psychology*” capable of rendering thinkable “her version of reality” and the “several layers of the psyche” through which it played out, the multiplicity of another psyche.<sup>526</sup> The questions necessary for the endeavor were assembling together too. Having somehow seen, now “in a flash,” that each of her alters, “the aspects,” was her and vice versa, she was able finally to really ask after the consequences: “As I bring these aspects back through my psychological window, are they automatically personified by... the psyche?,” and “what relationship does such personification have to the original aspect it represents?”<sup>527</sup>

As formulated, the queries finally make explicit some problems that had long been in play as well as others that had only recently emerged. First, she had been, as she had said well before, at once herself and Seth, and now, feeling the same about all the new alters,

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<sup>523</sup> AC, 89.

<sup>524</sup> AC, 90.

<sup>525</sup> After the waters receded, there was, as Roberts Butts wrote elsewhere, “no drinkable water without boiling, no heat, no hot baths, mud all over. Our flooded car looked like a prehistoric monster, its hulk buried in piles of mud.” See Jane Roberts, *The Nature of Personal Reality: A Seth Book* (San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1974).

<sup>526</sup> These terms are all utilized again in AC, 89-91.

<sup>527</sup> AC, 89.

whom she would soon be referring to as “traces,” she understood the artifice of the personae by which she brought back and dramatized the others (or other forces) she “tuned into,” the fact the masks that made them intelligible worked at the cost of distorting their peculiar realities, whatever those were. Second, she was also thinking, now much more precisely, that there was an artifice to her self, our own. As the fragments from the flood show, she had begun to assess just who or what opens and then moves through the psychological aperture to the aspects: the “extra I” that so travels after disconnecting from the “usual I” is, note her words, only one postulated or hypothesized, since, as she no doubt sees, such radical departure from self cannot and does not involve self at all, at least in any familiar or known sense. Which leads her to question what self is in the first place—only a few lines later, facing the consequences of what she has just said, she declares the psyche’s aspects to be “the components of the personality,” “the stuff” comprising it, but without suggesting that these are, as such, other selves, since she instead emphasizes there that they are “abilities” or, as it is put in other notes from the session, “moods” and “daydreams.”<sup>528</sup> So that self is now sounding a lot like the effect of a multiplicity or congeries of forces that mistakes itself, metaleptically (old story), for its own cause, and thereby forgets and denies what constitutes it. (Think, now, of how palpably she had, losing herself, felt once-exterior things and forces, and the relations between them, as what “she” really was, the really or “super” real...)

Yet as keeps happening, she at the same time persists in stubbornly maintaining the reality of distinct self, as if somehow there is, despite and amidst all the dissociation and multiplication but not merely before or following it, some ‘I’; not really another me breaking with me, an additional or “extra” ‘I’ (yet the following is, at bottom, why she improvised the term), but a self that would know itself as other(s) to self, anti- and non-self, yet not through—this is the twist—bringing all this into its (old) self, but by losing itself and thereby entering a strange, improbable zone in which self is, at once, self and other, the bizarre, basic consciousness of this. Hence this, the third problem: what self and consciousness are if these can be despite the discontinuities and caesuras that supposedly always only suspend and erase them, as presence to themselves. While this last issue is nowhere yet implicit in her words, it would come to her shortly, as “*the psychology*”—again: “*the theory*,” “*the conceptual framework*,” “*the metaphysics of the unconscious*”—further articulated itself through her, she articulating it.

The person the lie that makes the self, a multiplicity of forces the self’s denied reality: Jane, in the moment of her avowed breakthrough and triumph, brushes against, in the dark no-man’s land of their mutual articulation, the very philosophies, this time real ones, that emerged in the same decades of her fantastic ecstasies but an ocean and perhaps half a world away, virtually proffering one of its most infamous thoughts, even if in an improvised, underground pop form. Yet just after slipping by, she moves far off, claiming this: All the others, these differences, can be made subject to the self, can be made into, that is, a subject. As if she herself had seen, because she believed the others or aspects were somehow spiritual, that there can be self amidst its dispersion, that self is dispersion. But this, no one has yet said, or told you.

But should they have, and could they? This question, for now ours (as distinct, to some extent, from her own), has to be addressed. For chasing after Jane this far, pursuing her through the maze of hallways and rooms making up her psychedelic mind is not

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<sup>528</sup> AC, 89.



something I have done, as has perhaps (up to now) been the case with you, solely out of fascination with the weird, inverted images sent back by its funhouse mirrors, a curiosity for the wild syntax graffitied across its walls, or because of the satisfaction that comes from discovering the strange, unidentifiable intelligence behind their bizarre architecture and construction. While the feeling of such pleasures keeps enticing us on, they have felt to me like preludes, better yet first blushes, to the trembles and shakes to be gotten from concepts of hers that, unless we had already run a road like Jane's, would make us feel again like ingénues, bumpkins in bed getting a first taste of what, in the big-city psyche, the grown-ups really do, high-stakes (role) play, which, after learning its ropes and getting repeatedly the you knocked out of you, would make you an altogether different kind of you. A thought, this one, unlikely to be your own, since for you this other you is still probably a revolting and frightening sight, and the "theory" of it, still mostly disconnected (adaptors not included) from contemporary thoughts and words—from any account, that is, of the subject or whoever comes after...

Quite likely, though, you long ago accepted or acquiesced to believe yourself ever dispersed, fragmented, and falling-apart, either because the difference between yourself and you was precisely what made you, while also deferring you away from that self forever, or, alternatively, because you came to see that you as the mere, constant result of a variety of interactions and processes with other beings lying under or behind it; with the consequence, that there was no underlying, stable you enacting your thoughts and deeds as their subject (especially not as consciousness...). So that maybe in encountering weird Jane, you are now being presented with the beginnings of an alternative. Not those already available (like a subject of the unconscious), but something stranger and much more unforeseen.

Because if it can be granted that the early Jane-switched-into-Seth, when she declared, in the mid-sixties, that "ALL THINGS COULD BE CALLED FRAGMENTS" (the self especially included), really managed to conceive of an 'I,' since it must always break from another to become "independent," as just "one of various egos" an individual will have—meaning that all her talk of fragmentation was not just cover for a belief that the weird psyche comprised of many selves is just (even if its name, "multidimensional personality," is a play on "multiple personality") the greater Self they will be when they stop being fragments—then Jane has to be quite close to us, the readers and writers of theory and thinking, we who believe, whatever way we do, the self to be the fiction or faking of an instant, forgetting its divisions and myriad constitution (and she has to be much closer than most of us to the experience of such fragmentation). And if it is further accepted that Jane, someone, quite obviously, who hit upon such formulas because she was a "channel," was nonetheless not avoiding their consequences when she said that "having a whole self may be great, but if my Jane Roberts self is engulfed by it after death, then to me that's not much of a survival"<sup>529</sup> ("it's like saying that the little fish survives when it's eaten by a bigger one because it becomes part of it"<sup>530</sup>), that she wasn't just refortifying, demonstrating the supposed inevitability of the old ego when she described her trances and mergers as "more like being swept along with something else than being, say, negated"<sup>531</sup> (since "my ego wasn't lost" but only "put to the side"<sup>532</sup>)... if it is accepted, that is, that she wasn't being pulled into

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<sup>529</sup> *SM*, 233.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>531</sup> *SM*, 238.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*

narcissism's wide gravitational field (the denial of finitude, the suppression of the other voices inside us, ...) when she felt that she was still in play after being taken out of it, then we, those of us her high-speed pass ripped from that orbit and into a more eccentric circle about her, may just have to entertain the prospect that what has been variously meant by "subject"—consciousness, self-consciousness, will, presence-to-self, imaginary mirage, position in language, or, most profoundly, an identity for-itself—is not altogether incompatible with or in contradiction with its suspension, caesura, gaps, or times out, since it can instead continue (without reappropriation) on the other side of these, awakening again as a lucid sleep or psychedelic consciousness where "the opposition," central to modern metaphysics, "of dream to wakefulness,"<sup>533</sup> of "confused" and "obscure" to "clear and distinct" (of "intoxication" and "stupor" to "representation")<sup>534</sup> falls apart, the polarity between its terms neither holding nor becoming undecidable but falling into obsolescence in the face of an experience of being both, a self adept at being at once together, in possession of itself, and at a loss, passed out.

Since Jane & Co. said this, they—"Jane," "Seth," "Seth II," "Seven," "William James," "Cézanne"—of all people, have to be heard offering the account of what basically, after its deconstruction and counteractualization, they do: an account of a subject that has undergone desubjectivation, of the subject after desubjectivation—*its*, *their*, "desubjectivation. Or else, when ten years later, in 1976, Jane describes the trance as "an accelerated state" comparable more "to a higher state of wakefulness than to sleep," "but a different kind of wakefulness, in which the usual world seems to be the one that is sleeping," and in which "attention is not blunted" but "elsewhere"; when she again insists she is "not discarded" from ecstasy, even if during it she "steps out of her Jane-self in some indescribable way" into "another 'I' who leaves Jane" and whose "conditions of perception are those native to other lands of consciousness than ours"<sup>535</sup> (and where "peaks and valleys, psychological colorations and intensities" are what is perceived<sup>536</sup>), and when she again insists that she "remains inviolate" in that other "dimension of experience and identity" while nonetheless merging there, after an "instant transformation," with something other: "I become Seth or Seth becomes me"<sup>537</sup> ... or else, when she writes all this, all us who accepted, all the difficulties included, that it is the other or an "it" in us who thinks or decides, we will end up shut down and off, the possibility lost on us that some journeys outside the subject (not just this one) end up detoured and rerouted back into it, but to a subject now transformed into what, up until now, it could not be: multiply one, unitarily plural, together and dispersed, a consciousness of itself other(s). We could miss out, that is, on how Jane's (selves') long, eventually quite precise claim to self amidst dispersion may address just "how," as deconstruction asked, "a disparate could [...] hold together, and if one can ever speak of the disparate itself, selfsame," especially when what is disjoint is a plurality of

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<sup>533</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 316. The inevitability of the undecidability between these terms postulated by deconstruction will be questioned in a chapter to be written for the book version of this dissertation.

<sup>534</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 213, where these classical metaphysical doublets get rearranged and given new significations: the "clarity" of classical, representational consciousness is dubbed "clear and confused," the thought and sensation of the virtual is called "distinct and obscure."

<sup>535</sup> UR, xxiii.

<sup>536</sup> UR, xxiv.

<sup>537</sup> UR, xxiii.

“separated” and “juxtaposed” voices.<sup>538</sup> Ignore her, and we miss how she, a certain disparate, achieved consciousness as disparate, while at the same time it was not just her that was aware of being dispersed, so that this sense of consciousness, if it can indeed be called a subject, is not “a relation to self” or “reappropriation” but something else—a relation, however rare, between two selves or others forming *one* plural self—and the difficulty-spotted image of this self-other will be lost on us... an image of “each of us... several” that is at the same time a consciousness of it.

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<sup>538</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 18-19.

“BEING AWARE OF OUR PROBABLE VARIATIONS, SEEING EACH AS REAL AS THE OTHER,” FORCES US TO ASK, “IN WHICH WHEN?, TO WHAT YOU?...”

*Jane Roberts’ terms and the philosophical concepts they suggest—trance as “a different kind of wakefulness,” “a subject of desubjectivation,” “other-consciousness”—not only have to be developed but justified against the obvious charge that they amount to a strange, even perverse, attempt at returning to a metaphysical understanding of the subject after deconstruction and other critiques of the tradition have displaced this. The prospect of such a subject, that is, is basically dialectical in that it would require that conditions that involve the absence of subjectivity or logical identity—difference, dispersal, plurality, and syncope as “pure” or prephenomenal states—somehow be made for itself and thus “for” a subject. If it is even possible, such an outcome would, a still-common charge would read, reduce to identity what cannot or should not be returned to or reappropriated by identity.*

*Outside deconstruction, it is Deleuze’s work that made the strongest case for why difference and multiplicity are the basic state of the real and why identity must therefore be their a posteriori result. Any attempt to recast the relation of the subject to plurality obviously has to contend with and contest his formulation of this problem. Yet on the other hand, Deleuze is also the thinker with whom Roberts shares the greatest affinity, as his attempt to account for what an instance of the real is if it is not an identity led him to treat it as an “individuation” where the bounds (physical or definitional) between supposed identities do not hold and things thus are interpenetrated with each other. Both channeling (as a psychic condition) and her visionary ecstasies (as sensible experience) are states in which “she” has an experience of being part of individuals or bodies that are not entirely her own, and much of her writing and thinking is an attempt to conceive what “self” is in that event. For this reason, Jane is to a certain extent a “mystic” whose experience and thinking confirm Deleuze’s understanding of the real. Now the fact she is at once both proximate and quite distant from his thinking is indicative of the problem at the heart of my endeavor. In the absence of any ontotheological guarantee of the identity of instances of the real, the problem of how to think their distinctness and individuality arises (i.e., what is a thing if it is not identifiable or recognizable in the fashion one thinks it to be?). Yet this does not mean that subject and consciousness are possible only as reductions or occlusions of the character of the real; the tasks of articulating a new conception and inventing a new form of subjectivity becomes an important task, since the individual involved in any “act” of knowledge, will, and desire is no longer simply or entirely “itself.”*

*An argument for why this problem becomes urgent in relation to spiritual practice, spiritual ethics, and an immanentist ontology will be made in Chapter Six. For now, I limit myself to showing both Roberts’ proximity to Deleuze and how her work illumines the relevance of his to the problems she herself thought. The point of this is also to lay out what a typical “Deleuzian” reading of Jane would be. Although the situation was different even half a decade ago, reading Deleuze on his own terms alone and apart from problems foreign to his is unlikely to contribute anything new to theory in anthropology: Deleuze’s key texts are now over forty years old and no longer considered novel in inventive quarters of philosophy (where one thinker—Alain Badiou—is now dominant, and a series of others, including Slavoj Žižek, Catherine Malabou, Bernard Stiegler, and Judith Butler, have come to constitute “contemporary thought”). Yet this has not prevented some anthropologists from attempting a “new” turn to Deleuze, a move that is being undertaken with little reflection on how Deleuze’s work is an attempt to think in general and not a theory to be “applied” to specific phenomena (Deleuzian anthropology thus also makes little attempt to consider how anthropological research might lead one to recast Deleuze’s understandings of ontology, ethics, etc. in terms that are equally ontological, ethical, etc. and not merely empirical or “social theoretical.”) In order to set the stage for a more profound attempt at considering philosophy in an anthropological fashion, this chapter lays out the typical*

*Deleuzian reading of Jane so that a different reading—which is to say more inventive and critical one—can be undertaken later.*

*The most immediate link between Roberts' writing and Deleuze's philosophy is their respective commitments to an understanding of the real as being immanent to itself. Once ontotheological thought is no longer accepted as viable, no philosopheme or conceptual terms can be accorded a position that transcends—stands outside and constitutes—the rest. Thus Deleuze treats the real as groups (“multiplicities” or “collections,” i.e., agencements) of individuations that constitute and deconstitute each other without according any of them what would in the end amount to ontological primacy. Because Deleuze acquires this understanding of the immanence of the real to itself from his reading of Spinoza, for whom there is arguably a mutual immanence between substance and modes (which is to say *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*), he tends to call thinkers, writers, and artists who approximate his views “Spinozans.”<sup>539</sup> Roberts' own understanding of “God” and “being” as laid out in chapters two and three is certainly immanentist in this sense: beyond treating the divine as something inextricable from actuality and thus undoing its traditional status as a transcendent origin, Jane also refuses to treat “spirit” or “spiritual consciousness” (terms she adamantly believes in) as coming prior to actuality and phenomenality. Actualities and temporal presences are not derived from the “potential field” she often speaks of; instead, they and this field are mutually constitutive of each other, and are within a sphere that, as we saw her say in chapter four, has “no outside.” In this sense, she is a Spinozist and/or “immanentist” in her vernacular ontology, and is referred to as such throughout this chapter.*

*Since the “participatory” dimension of my research on Jane Roberts involved adopting some of her concepts and attempting to think with and through them, this chapter is written as if it had been channeled, which is to say it is articulated in the first person and using Deleuze's voice. The reader can judge for himself or herself whether this contributed anything to the overall intellectual project of the dissertation.*

*The most important part of this chapter in relation to the broader project of this book are the section devoted to the Deleuzian notions of counteractualization and time and how Roberts herself articulates ideas that are very close to them. This sets the stage for the precise philosophical argument about consciousness and imagination in the next chapter.*

## A DELEUZIAN MYSTIC?

There are any reasons Jane Roberts deserves a place among the Spinozans, but as a thinker and not just a “mystic.” Not only for the interesting and often remarkable half-concepts, half-percepts to be found in her work (the somewhat mad kind Guattari and I insisted should be studied as seriously as those of classical philosophers), but because hers was the kind of life we could have readily treated in one of the hagiographical fragments strewn throughout our joint and solo books, the many devoted to the saints or anti-saints of the immanentist, Spinozan God (not the old God), the many sorcerers and diabolical scientists whose discipleship to the Christ of philosophy consisted in relentlessly finding the routes leading away from the “strata” and to connections with forces and elements outside the human being. If mystics of the old kind became very few and of diminished importance, it is because the seeker now looks for a relation to “God” that is quite different for being about finding the parts of it allowing for a bit more creation and change and not its silent contemplation or exemplification. The mystery for these seekers is instead like that of a good detective novel or scientific experiment, since it concerns neither an ultimate and unspeakable secret nor an ideal life, but breaking open reality through the continual, partial

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<sup>539</sup> See, generally, Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988).

discovery of how hitherto trivial and unessential things in fact contain the power to allow for a departure from the prisons of life. Such seekers, as we so often said, thus test everything in reach to see if it can be connected with (they do so like children: food and crayons in the mouth, a fork in the socket...), so as to cut a path out of the false sensible or reality that every thinker, mystic or otherwise, has wanted to be finished with, but also toward a new distribution of reality in which they need no longer be themselves or some other but a new individuation or conjuncture of forces.

Jane Roberts belongs amongst these consummate seekers precisely because her experiment is at all times conducted both in relation to the crack or fissure that tends to split open in the writer's life and with the forces that come into view through it and then begin either to be drawn into his own now-disturbed orbit or instead sweep him along the other way, into a fast drift into lands where, as it is put in *What Is Philosophy?*, "every compass goes mad."<sup>540</sup> What split Jane is scarcely different from what broke open those writers, like Antonin Artaud, Henri Michaux, Henry Miller and Kafka, who constantly thematized their fragmentation—a "silent, imperceptible crack" that is "neither internal nor external"<sup>541</sup> to any self or world since it opens to an "outside [...] farther away than any form of exteriority"<sup>542</sup>—and what she describes finding at that non-zone is quite proximate to what each of these writers saw there. When the first fissure opens, she feels not only an "avalanche of radical ideas" rush in at "unbearable volume" along with "sensations, intensified and pulsating" much like the "speed of thought" Michaux feels under the influence of mescaline or "the cruelty" Artaud senses, but she also "suddenly felt the fantastic vitality in things inanimate"—"a nail was sticking in the windowsill and I experienced ever so briefly the consciousness of the atoms and molecules that composed it"—echoing as she did so the same Miller who felt life as abundant. Looking ahead into what is still to be written about her here, we even see her Kafakesque side, since it is in her trances that she undergoes an involution of thought and life, calling Seth an "animal," seeing "animal-men" in her visions, and follows a wild streak in which she follows "an absolute line" leading away from body and soul, perhaps until it becomes so untenable as to lead to death. (The rheumatoid arthritis behind her early death is often said to have been dangerously exacerbated by the physical immobility entailed by her incessant regimen of channeling and writing.) In every instance, we see Jane following the fissure—often quite literally, as when she entered "the hole into another world"—into the outside-zone of these other forces, which she then connects with those that had been her own ("I was turned on, tuned in, *connected*") to realize new concatenations or arrangements, each time assessing their level of agreeability or disagreeability with what, moving in her, opened to creation and life. Or, in her words, to "superlife" or "the superreal"...

#### "THE ONLY CONCEIVABLE DIFFERENCE"

Calling her another fellow immanentist/Spinozist is thus entirely right. Of course she did not read *The Ethics* or care for the kind of patient and precise thinking it demands, but she was amongst those with both a powerful intuition of the physics of the real to be found in it and a honed conception of how life can be most effectively lived in relation to it.

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<sup>540</sup> *WIP?*, 52.

<sup>541</sup> *LOS*, 155.

<sup>542</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 121. Hereafter cited as *F*.

Such seekers understand, because they first and foremost feel it, that no ontological hierarchy whatsoever orders the different forms the real takes. They understand, in their own peculiar ways, that the ordinary, phenomenal distinctions between beings that genres and species are supposed to represent are just linguistic conventions rooted, in all cases, in “the ultimate genera” of being—the broadest, seemingly irreducible genres (animal, vegetable, mineral)—which are in turn founded on the division of the real into different ontological registers or orders of significance: intelligible/sensible, *res cogitans/res extensa*, discourse/matter. Whether such registers are properly philosophical or those that govern scientific or everyday thought, the *there is something* or “*what is*” comprising everything in its being is, they see, only so “distinguished” into “form, species, and genus”<sup>543</sup> after first being cut in two when these registers are attributed to the real and conceived as coming prior to them—as happens when objective reality or linguistic meaning are understood as founding reality (either through the former furnishing primary qualities, quantitative measures, beings, and genres that language then descriptively matches or instead through the autonomous construction by the latter of these and their transposition onto the real).

What the seekers sense and basically realize is that unless such modern counterparts to the old ontotheological God or ground are believed in and presumed, there is little chance of distinguishing between the different kinds of beings found in “reality” through the old means of division and classification. And they sense, moreover, the reasons to give up faith in the foundational status of these principles or registers: “Signification can never,” on the one hand, “exercise its role of last foundation” for thought since it can only be ensured through the “denotation” of some essential part of itself as true (particular meanings can only be true if there is somewhere a correspondence between meaning as such and reality), while the truth or falsity of the latter “indication” of objective reality, on the other, always of course presupposes a prior order of conceptual signification to render it intelligible.<sup>544</sup> Since neither signification nor reference are guarantees of the truth and reliability of genre, it becomes apparent to the seekers that the whole of the real has but one ontological register or “sense” and that nothing in it, as a consequence, can be differentiated from anything else.

Such seekers often for a while go a little bit, even very, crazy upon feeling or realizing that the real can have just one sense, since it is really quite a “mad thought” that understands everything to be “formless,” “non-specific,” and “non-generic.”<sup>545</sup> Hence we find Jane and others like her talking the different kinds of nonsense children and some schizophrenics do—infantile expressions of the resultant transitivity like “I was the paper” or else others aimed at making language onomatopoeiatically match the interpenetration of things (her glossolalia)—but being unable to really think on the basis of these, since grammar and syntax no longer function when the differences between things stops being presupposed (but we will see that she still managed to think...). Artaud, for instance, suffered terribly “this collapse” where “the entire world loses its meaning” because “things and propositions no longer have a frontier between them,”<sup>546</sup> for not only does the body thereby lose its boundaries (“inside and the outside... no longer have a precise limit” so that “everything is a mixture... interlocking and penetration”) but also “every word is physical” as a result,

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<sup>543</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Untitled teaching lecture on Spinoza, January 24, 1978.

<http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=14&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2> (accessed May 4, 2011).

Hereafter cited as *DLS*.

<sup>544</sup> See *LOS*, 18.

<sup>545</sup> *DLS*.

<sup>546</sup> *LOS*, 86-87.

“decomposed into syllables, letters, and above all consonants which act directly on the body, penetrating and bruising it.”<sup>547</sup> “Being has teeth” was one of his characterizations of this violence,<sup>548</sup> and we should not be sure that Jane, in her brushes with madness, was immune to the threat of it.

But there is a “means of getting out of this” so that life and thinking can be reconciled with this (inevitable) implosion of genre. Such strategies, without knowing it, essentially say, “Of course there are differences between beings, and in any case being is said in one and the same sense of everything which is.”<sup>549</sup> Different beings, that is, are a primary fact, and they can be thought as different without splitting the real in two and then classifying all of it.

Now even if they were to write something close to this, the seekers nonetheless only vaguely grasp or sketch this exceedingly difficult thought as a thought. Historically, it is philosophers (although not too many of them) who are able to exposit the idea with precision, since doing so then requires explaining just “what the differences in beings consist in”<sup>550</sup> if their particular and generic forms no longer define them in accordance with some ontological register or “sense.” What Spinoza and those who repeated (or even sometimes preceded) him ended up saying here was that the difference between the individuals making up the real can be accounted for only if they are conceived as completely unique powers or capacities to do things that also at the same time realize the one, same power they turn out to be when there is no foundational order (no other, ideal world) to refer them to. According each instance of the real an equal ontological status as a realization or expression of this force is precisely what allows for a novel means of distinguishing them: if, all categories and forms gone, (what had been thought) “a table, a little boy, a little girl, a locomotive, a cow, a god” now “are” in the same sense, they nonetheless remain different from each other insofar as they have different capacities or “degrees of power” delinked from the essences they supposedly have as different kinds of beings.

The reasons why “the only conceivable difference” has to become that between capacities are quite simple. First, when genre and form get crushed under the collapse upon them of the old primary registers of being, so too does the classical concept of essence as something a being fully has only potentially but not actually and in the contingencies of its existence. “In other words,” take away linguistically-defined or ostensibly objective predeterminations of what is properly possible for an individual being, and “what is can only be put in relation to being at the level of existence, and not at the level of essence” in this old sense.<sup>551</sup> What something is has, if it has no essence, to be its sheer existence conceived as whatever capacities it turns out to have been able, in fact, to realize. Existing potentials to or for... end up being all there “actually” is—the real itself—when things cannot be sorted into the genres supposed to identify and define them but acquire, again, one and the same sense (“univocity”).

While those I am calling seekers do not, again, manifestly arrive at such a means of conceiving the (re-) establishment of difference after genres and their foundations fail, they

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<sup>547</sup> *LOS*, 87.

<sup>548</sup> *LOS*, 91.

<sup>549</sup> *DSL*.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>551</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Untitled teaching lecture on Spinoza*, March 24, 1981.

<http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=114&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2> (accessed May 4, 2011). Hereafter cited as *DSLII*.



nonetheless often avoid becoming mired in the madness of thinking everything mixed and undifferentiated by rejecting morality and along with it, therefore, the essences men and women (and every other kind of thing) must supposedly try to embody. The individual then becomes only what he or she does, and distinctions again become possible.

#### INTENSITY, WHITE HOLES, VARIATIONS

Yet what separates Jane Roberts from most who think this way is her explicit concern with some of the ontological and ethical problems entailed by the demise of the ontological register and the reestablishment of difference. It is no coincidence that she laid out (in the text she called “An Introduction to Aspect Psychology”), as we will see, a fantastically conceived or envisioned physics that treats the real as first being something like waves that then condense, through processes of temporalization and spatialization, into particles that later congeal into formed things. Because if the real is composed of unique powers that are nonetheless ontologically the same, what must still then be explained is just how the same power can exist in a diversity of singular ways while still being commensurate, or, in other words, how there is “an equality of the unequal” allowing for the sameness necessitated by such a unity, a problem that draws us into the almost subatomic domain where it can be addressed.

Doing this requires understanding that the real is neither a plurality of forces of finally equal capacity nor a simple sum of unequal forces, but a whole at once both “heterogeneous and continuous.”<sup>552</sup> On the one hand, the diversity of powers to... or things happening in it, while necessarily unique (no God, again, prevents it), are only distinct relationally—as powers, that is, either to do something to a something else (that is itself a force) or to have something done to them by something else—and are therefore always elements of fields of these forces they relate to as well as of the entirety of these (no force is in principle finally isolatable or dissociable from others). Since a power is only a power insofar as “it is related to others,”<sup>553</sup> and since nothing prohibits “the relation of all forces,”<sup>554</sup> all powers are commensurate—“equal,” ontologically—and thus comprise, in principle, a continuous whole or unity of force upon force. Yet on the other hand, such relatability as the common measure or bond of the real gets misconstrued when it is conceived, as still happens in “mechanistic theory,” as entailing that every force has a selfsame numerical identity, since such an “abstract concept” of quantity can only result in “an identification, an equalization of the unity... an annulment of the difference in the unity” otherwise keeping it unequal to itself.<sup>555</sup> Ontological equality does not involve numerical equalization because the relational nature of force entails its being the difference between itself and what resists and limits it (or vice versa) and thus always a “reciprocal determination” whose putative identity is only the difference or interval between its terms. So while “quantity is the essence of force,” it is so only as “difference of quantity,” a (self-) heterogeneity of force and the whole of it that cannot be presented in algebraic terms of whole numbers.

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<sup>552</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 37. Hereafter cited as *B*.

<sup>553</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 40. Hereafter cited as *N*.

<sup>554</sup> *N*, 44.

<sup>555</sup> *N*, 43.

Expressing how there is a sameness to the diversity of the real requires, then, conceiving its continuity as involving uncancellable difference. This can be done by means of the idea of intensive magnitude—quantities of degree—which is the type of quantity used to measure properties of systems like “temperature, pressure, and tension.”<sup>556</sup> Since such properties do not change from (extensive) part to part of a system, they are characteristic of it as a whole; their measure therefore characterizes the relations between the parts inasmuch as the parts are in relations of force with each other and thus continuous and indissociable. The sameness or commensurability of the diverse can be expressed in such terms, then, because intensive quantity expresses relations between different things without reducing the relations to terms/identities. An intensive “degree” is not a unit but a difference.

While it would seem that such precise thoughts have little to do with Jane, what the modern seer often sees after rending the veil is not some pure One or a void beyond number but these very differences of force making up the real. Where Michaux sees waves and Miller atoms, Jane feels, in her first ecstasy, something “intensified and pulsing,” the “pressure of the cars” during the vision at the window, and “gradations” in her trances that are “almost impossible to explain”—“peaks and valleys . . . intensities”<sup>557</sup>—and it would be unlikely that, my terms, “the intensive continuum” underneath things that these perceptions indicate is not exactly what she is pursuing when, as Seth, she imagines “basic units” or “units of consciousness” being the constitutive, subphenomenal stuff of the whole real. She realizes, would almost have to, that only something like subatomic forces, quantum “waves,” she says, “which can indeed appear in several places at once”<sup>558</sup> and thus create, my terms now, “nonlocalizable connections” which could, hers again, as distinct things “attract,” “intermix” with, and “repel”<sup>559</sup> each other while at the same time being continuous or somehow identical with each other (“despite . . . how it,” the unit, “mixes with other such units, its own identity is not annihilated”<sup>560</sup>). She not only sees, then, the force-nature of the real but also manages to understand its differential character.

Once she has gone that far, she ends up channeling and even hallucinating a pseudoquantum “metaphysics” in order to explain just why the real so rarely looks like the almost indescribable vibrations that appear in her ecstasies to be its basic character. In short, she herself comes up against the problem of what brings it about that the real most often takes the shape of a phenomenal reality of distinct, self-identical beings instead of appearing to be (my words again) the “network of ideal, nonlocalizable connections”<sup>561</sup> it is in its most elementary form as nonpresent, “constantly changing”<sup>562</sup> force; the problem, in other words, of how most of the things comprised by the real get outfitted with, as Jane often says, “stability” and “oneness” if they are really at bottom just, my terms, the “distance” between force and force. Since these questions do not at all, for her or anyone else really asking them, concern some ostensibly ultimate, theological origin of things, she veers right into a basically scientific terrain in which distinguished reality is an “inevitable phenomenon”—“beneficial

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<sup>556</sup> *DR*, 222.

<sup>557</sup> *UR*, xxiv.

<sup>558</sup> *UR*, 40.

<sup>559</sup> *UR*, 39.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>561</sup> *DR*, 183.

<sup>562</sup> *UR*, 48.

in many respects and unfortunate in many others”<sup>563</sup>—encountered as a basic fact, so that the issue is to conceive how it gets that way. Her own answer indeed starts from the immanentist intuition of a real, as I say, “permeated by unformed, unstable matters” and “transient particles” and then postulates the “imprisoning” and “locking”<sup>564</sup> of these into what she calls “white holes”<sup>565</sup> and what can otherwise be termed, as I do, “occlusions,” both the “molecules large and small” (literal molecules and cells, phonemes, pieces of memory) and the “more rigid” and “organized” “aggregates”<sup>566</sup> that form from these (organs and organisms, languages, psyches). In brief, she makes her concern understanding the process by which things go from unequal intensive equality to equalized phenomenal inequality through the congealing of both orders. Meaning how, Jane-as-Seth now, the “units approach physical structure” and “slow down” so that “certain intensities are built up,” which then “form your cellular structure” and a “body that appears permanent... from one moment to the next.”<sup>567</sup>

If she of all people accounts in her books for this constant “articulation” of the real into these two orders this is because understanding the real’s transition into its forms is as much the business of “the dreamer” or seer as “the savant.”<sup>568</sup> Both undergo, whether in the same or dissimilar ways, the rare experience of a shock to the senses revealing, “beneath concepts and representations,” the order of intensity and then “a molecular perception” or glimpse of both the “particles” constituent of reality normally lying at the threshold of phenomenality and their emergence out of the former, more primal condition.<sup>569</sup> While the seer or visionary tends to depict this side of the real aesthetically or communicate a grand, vague cognition of it, the savant instead sets about both accounting for this passage from intensity to molecule to the apparent phenomenal wholes of reality while not (still theologically) conceiving the last of these as corresponding to linguistic or objective genera. Whether these entities are geological, biological, psychological, or social, his examination of their reality always first of all turns up both the half of it congealing, out of the primal “flows and elastic fluids” of the real, “similar particles” like “atoms and molecules,” and the side of it involving the “unification, totalization, and integration” of those parts into wholes, as well as the fact that both kinds of form arise only from intensive interactions/relations of force that occur below it and that are then “unfolded” or “cancelled out” in these forms.<sup>570</sup>

What further becomes apparent to this peculiar sort of scientist or thinker is that since only an ontotheological God or ground could guarantee the conformity of existent entities to preexisting genres, the process giving rise to them has itself to be conceived as possibly leading not just to the unpredictable results it does but also in multiple directions at any one time—in principle toward them all. Since there can be no “irreducible axes, types, or branches” in the real, all matter contains all potentials until it has become specified. Monsters or biological anomalies reveal, for example, that “elements... arrested or

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<sup>563</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>564</sup> *ATP*, 41.

<sup>565</sup> *AC*, passim.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>567</sup> *UR*, 61. Jane, as Seth, is very close to the Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition* and “The Geology of Morals” here.

<sup>568</sup> *DR*, 218.

<sup>569</sup> See, passim, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “The Geology of Morals,” *ATP*, 39-75.

<sup>570</sup> See, again, “The Geology of Morals,” passim.

inhibited” during the integration of a particular species of embryo could just as well have turned into traits of another (the failed vertebrate’s skeleton, for instance, shows that it could have been a cephalopod)<sup>571</sup> and thus attest to the existence of an animal potential existing across diverse species, an organic potential beneath it common to certain molecules, a physiochemical potential of certain atoms... Before the nascent entity crosses such thresholds and becomes committed to following certain routes of actualization, it is liable to head down others, including some that have never been encountered (no possibility is predetermined); but even afterwards, some parts of it retain this potential and can therefore still send it off in other directions, such as mutation or cancer.

Jane also sees all this, she-as-Seth telling us the “basic unit... is endowed with unpredictability [which] allows for infinite patterns and fulfillments”: while they acquire their own “inclinations” and “propensities,” “all probabilities are probed and experienced,” “all possible universes created from these.”<sup>572</sup> “This applies,” he and they continue, “in a different way... to the behavior of worlds, atoms, and psychological structures.”<sup>573</sup> “No existence is dead-end,”<sup>574</sup> meaning that for her too, the creative potential of pure, unformed force somewhere remains in even the most congealed or formed things so that they can always undergo metamorphosis. This place is what in them is immediately continuous with the whole of power immanent throughout its many realizations, “the godhood” that “straddles the reality of each unit and the mass reality of all units.”<sup>575</sup>

What is remarkable about Jane is that while she is constantly struck, as only a visionary can be, with hallucinations of this improbable potential of the real, she feels a compulsion few of them do to offer such conceptualizations of it. Where this course of thought leads her, as we are about to see, is right into the thick swirl of those questions that almost inevitably encroach upon us when we begin to consider how we ourselves are the real’s limitless power and potential to do or to be... “*Being aware of its probable variations, seeing each as real as the other,*” she says, forces us to see that *we too “straddle realities unknown to us”* so that we must ask “*what [is] happening to which who in what when,*” or, in other words: “*In which when? To what you?*”<sup>576</sup>

## ANOTHER BODY: POWER AND SENSATION

### *Body*

Now the many writers, painters, and filmmakers warranting the immanentist label are so dubbed not because they take up these exact questions but because they understand with a great deal of precision some issues these branch into...

Since they have, first, lost faith in the reality of the beings language carves into the real, the seekers end up giving up as well all belief that a body can ever be one’s own alone or even coincide with the ostensible material or form of the organism. What falls apart for them when the normal use of language or sense of objectivity does are not just taxonomic categories but also the presumption that individual things can ever be fixed as instances of

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<sup>571</sup> ATP, 46.

<sup>572</sup> UR, 39-40.

<sup>573</sup> UR, 44.

<sup>574</sup> UR, 44.

<sup>575</sup> UR, 53.

<sup>576</sup> AC, 135.

these and thereby within their apparent phenomenal bounds. When Jane, for instance, sings of a pear tree that is also the earth (“pear tree-harvesting-earth-self”<sup>577</sup>) or describes her experience of “feeling part of everything I saw,”<sup>578</sup> she is seeing that such assemblages or conjunctures of things indeed make up other (inter-) things our ways of speaking teach us to ignore. Once the seekers recognize such “assemblages,” they next discover the consequences for their own body: not so much that “the lived body” normally identified with is completely unreal, but that it is “a paltry thing in comparison with” another body “beyond the organism”<sup>579</sup> and that can be “felt under the body” so conceived<sup>580</sup> reaching into other bodies the latter is usually distinguished from.

This other body exists precisely because of the disrespect the real shows the genres imposed on it. While bodies as we think of them no doubt come together, as such “the body must be defined by the ensemble of relations which compose it,”<sup>581</sup> including those it has with things ostensibly outside it but that it is, via its relations, continuous with. All genera gone, there is and has to be “individuality of body” wherever such a “composite or complex relation [...] is preserved through all the changes that affect the parts of [that] body,” whether those changes arise from and happen to its seemingly intrinsic parts or occur, instead, between these and what seems foreign to them.<sup>582</sup> And since relations are as primary, as we have seen, as the terms they lie between, the body has both intensive and extensive parts, the former being the “vibrations” and “waves flowing through” the more obviously material parts of it and connecting these, again, to entities apparently outside them.<sup>583</sup>

Artuad, of course, attests that the interpenetration and fusion of the body with what one thinks oneself not to be made it completely irreducible to an organism, but we should not forget how the many other names, descriptions, and visions of it indicate this same (vibrational) interlocking and mixture of oneself with something else. Whitman, for instance, had the body electric, and Pessoa something similar. Jane joins them when she feels the waves traversing and composing the other body and ends up forgetting the coordinates of her “own”—she can then experience herself overlapping with other things and thus as “massive.”

### *Power*

What further makes seekers like Jane “immanetists” is their achieving power and “a feeling of power” through these new bodies quite different from anything the old mystics sought with theirs. Although the seekers indeed practice, as did the latter, “a high spirituality” whereby they “seek the elementary forces beyond the organic,” it is a “spirituality of the body” instead of the spirit since “the spirit is the body itself”—the other body—and has to be once the whole of the real is seen to be the same.<sup>584</sup> So even if the measures they take to make “the body escape from itself” often resemble the practices (like

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<sup>577</sup> AC, 72.

<sup>578</sup> AC, 84.

<sup>579</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 39. Hereafter cited as FB.

<sup>580</sup> FB, 43

<sup>581</sup> DSL.

<sup>582</sup> DSL.

<sup>583</sup> DSL.

<sup>584</sup> FB, 41.

flagellation) of various mystics, the seekers thereby aim not at approaching some summit of being or what is wholly other to it but to tie together more of the real in and upon themselves and thereby make the other body.

Whether what they connect up with are sounds and visions or more literal bodies, they do so out of an awareness that because bodies are not extricable from whatever forces impinge upon them, the powers they are increase or decrease depending on whether the latter agree with them or not. The seekers basically realize that the first capacity, which everything shares, is “the capacity for being affected” that Spinoza wanted “to correspond to every quantity of force.”<sup>585</sup> “The more ways,” he thought, “a body could be affected, the more force it had.”<sup>586</sup> And when the times caught up with him by putting the God (or man) once thought to determine what such power could or ought to do out of the picture, the question “what can a body do?” was asked, and the seekers began undertaking experiments aimed at finding out. The “numerous ambiguous approaches” they took—“alcohol, drugs, schizophrenia, sadomasochism,” as well as means “perverse, artistic, scientific, mystical, and political”—all involved testing the connections to see which led to circuits upping the internal energy and which just blew fuses or drained off the juice.<sup>587</sup> What remained of the old mysticisms was that the search always somehow involved opening oneself to and getting touched by some other; while “not necessarily a passivity” in the traditional sense, this habit of letting one’s affectability get stoked is quite close to the “passivity before all passivity” attributed to many mystics. But where the seekers nonetheless sharply differ is in their regarding the very emotions once thought to hinder the passage to God as vital indicators of whether their own power is on or not: every affect or force, as Spinoza said, results in an emotion, and the sad ones only bring us down because they literally disempower us. So they stopped valorizing anxiety, shame, and guilt and instead sought out emotions they considered joyous, meaning not only feeling of love or exuberance but anger and hatred too.

### *Sensation*

While the experimenters are already virtual mystics for both feeling and understanding their bodies to be without fixed boundaries, a third thing makes them immanentists of this sort: their knowing that one gets the most affection by taking it in the openings or gaps in what is enclosed, the splits and cracks in us where things pass, slip in and out and sometimes for a while stay—their sense, in other words, that powering up only happens through the sparking of sensations. “The wave,” they know, that always “flows through the body”<sup>588</sup> and between its parts eventually “encounters external forces” reaching it through the parts of the body “enveloping” such forces from its frontiers. Such encounters always cause “a sensation to appear”<sup>589</sup> since those elements of a body open toward their outside—pupils, mouths, ears, genitals, the skin—are susceptible to them. There is a constitutive tie, then, between the linkages generating and increasing the force of our (other) bodies and capacity for sensation: since the real is what, through “the direction of [its] forces on the nervous system,” sets off sensation, “what forces sensation can only be sensed” before it can be contended with through language, memory, imagination or any other faculty. Every attempt to experience or

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<sup>585</sup> N, 62.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

<sup>587</sup> ATP, 174.

<sup>588</sup> FB, 47.

<sup>589</sup> FB, 47.

think the real in its entirety must for that reason eventually contend with sensation being its own “origin”<sup>590</sup> or point of departure.

When this happens, the hierarchies governing the old mysticism obviously end up reversed: stilled or speaking minds turn out to be farther away from the “Power”<sup>591</sup> of the real than those whose senses are turned on and up, and the seekers consequently valorize image and sound over emptiness or the word as the both the means and results of approaching the real and attaining “variations in amplitude” of self. Many of the artists among them consequently speak, as did Cézanne, of painting the forces of the real or, like Boulez, of “capturing” it with sound and those who are the more immediate heirs of the mystics find their reason to pursue what has been elsewhere called sensible ecstasy.<sup>592</sup> Yet if sensation is to yield some cognition of the real it has in both cases to be pushed past its normal limits and into a “superior or transcendent exercise” capable of grasping intensity itself. While we will later on examine Jane’s avowed affinities with painters—she channeled, after all, her own Cézanne, we will for now only emphasize that the mystical pedagogy she devises as Seth places great weight on cultivating the so-called inner senses out of an understanding that the paths to the other body and power always pass through this kind of sensing. Even if the old inner senses of the Christian mystics grant immediate access to an (allegorical) knowledge of transcendent things not given through the ordinary senses, they get displaced in Jane’s rendition of them into a context in which God has become synonymous with the whole real.

“We are seeing things,” Jane now, “as they really are” when such senses are in use; “perception of a direct nature,” for instance, is possible for her, as we have seen, through a “vibrational touch” that bypasses phenomenality to immediately access the force-reality of something, “the electrical and chemical composition” of it that its concept only weakly expresses.<sup>593</sup>

## COUNTERACTUALIZATION

Jane perhaps also shares one more characteristic with all the modern inheritors of the old mysticism—a strange trait having to do with a paradox ever at work in the real. She knows, they know, and we can only thoroughly know through an immanentist thinking, that heightening the power that one is can only take place not just by making another body but by making it as unexplicated and unfinished as the parts of it most susceptible to being affected. The body that has become empowered by being made more receptive, we can see her seeing, is paradoxically one that becomes less actual and more potential (or less in reality and more in the real) so as to have more of a potential to affect or touch others. In other words, whatever has a great potential to... is precisely what has become more a potential to be... something else besides what it just was and would otherwise keep being.

“The fringe of indetermination surrounding individuals”—the sense one gets, for instance, of a barely realized “ass or lion”<sup>594</sup> at the edges of some people—“has often been commented upon,” I once said, arguing then that “the error, however, is to believe that this indetermination expresses something incomplete” instead of “the full, positive power of the

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<sup>590</sup> *DR*, 144.

<sup>591</sup> *FB*, 44.

<sup>592</sup> *FB*, 56.

<sup>593</sup> *SM*, 254-257.

<sup>594</sup> *DR*, 254.

individual.”<sup>595</sup> Because whether through faulty memory, an overactive imagination, or too much sympathy, the more we are joined to and therein affected by other things, the more those apparently foreclosed possibilities are alive and at work in an us that is then less what it is supposed be. We have already seen how Jane, who wanted to have such a great affect on the world (and who abhorred spiritual nihilism), hit upon so many aspects of this thought and consequently engaged in a grand potentialization of herself. But she also, the other seekers travelling with and often trailing behind her, experimented literally night and day with the different means of awakening such potentials through a “counteractualization” of self, through increasing “the fringes and margins”<sup>596</sup> in it and thereby affectivity itself.

There was, first, counteractualization by acting or miming, the similarity with channeling being both obvious and in need of clarification. When seemingly irreparable circumstances like “wars, wounds, and death” tear us from our power or separate us from what we can do, the means of “fighting a war against war” is to forget completely every belief telling us that such tragedies are “unjust and unwarranted” (this is just *ressentiment* talking: “it is always someone else’s fault”) and that they thus ought not affect us, and instead “will the event” or what is happening through declaring it to be exactly what we want.<sup>597</sup> Doing this, though, is not to practice “resignation” but rather “to will... something in what occurs” that is not quite what occurs, to bring about a double or fiction of what really happens through acting it—acting as if it was not fully “incarnate” or in “existence” but a kind of drama. “The actor strains his entire personality” to play the role of his life or be “the mime of what really occurs” “in order to transmute” the latter so that it “does not compromise the body” to the extent it otherwise would and instead “limit” it.<sup>598</sup>

Whatever did I mean by this? Or by characterizing such theater as “the apotheosis of the will... a sort of leaping in place of the whole body, which exchanges its organic will for a spiritual will”?<sup>599</sup> Jane can show us better than her fellow travellers. If we recall again that the vision that began everything for her was basically a trauma that took her close to madness—her head split open, reality fell apart—then the persona that became the drama of her life appears to be have been a quite effective means of keeping this “crack in the surface” of herself from “becoming a demolition job” wrecking her life into a psychotic break.<sup>600</sup>

Once she had made playing the role second nature, she went on, as we have seen, to let so many of the other “trace” potentials she felt inside come through the crack and into what was increasingly a virtual or ghost body. Each time she was touched by the force of another of them, she further becomes a potential while nonetheless also growing in power. Here began the “becomings,” as I called them, that so much has been made of and that turn up amongst nearly every modern seeker; she becomes many things through and besides the legion of her personas: first, the sexes (not just the ostensible thoughts) of her personas, so that the trance starts being the place of transient transgenderings; next come visions of herself being incarnate in other circumstances and identities; she then veers afield of the human when she starts encountering, as we have yet to see, hallucinatory doubles of herself that seem to belong to some foreclosed, hybrid species of humans and primates; finally come those ecstasies in which we have seen her dispersed into hyperconscious fragments

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<sup>595</sup> DR, 258.

<sup>596</sup> DR, 257.

<sup>597</sup> LOS, 149.

<sup>598</sup> LOS, 150-161.

<sup>599</sup> LOS, 149.

<sup>600</sup> See LOS, 157.



and particles of herself. We could also add, though, a becoming-god, since my philosophy was after all concerned with how all such becomings result in what is effectively an “anti-god” or “demon”—a “being” that leaps all (divinely guaranteed) enclosures or genres.

Now while all these things constituting the reality of Jane (her speech, lived body, social identity, autobiography, and the parts of these shared by others) indeed underwent changes as they were opened to these other possibilities, she did not of course “become” them in my sense. “Becomings,” as I repeatedly insisted, are quite different from “the metamorphosis of things and subjects” or their wholesale transformation into other things.<sup>601</sup> They rather “direct” the latter as their conditions, being first of all a change in the composition of “the material elements” of a body bringing about corresponding changes in the “affects it is capable of” (meaning, again, both those it can stand and those it can accomplish).<sup>602</sup> Recalling once more that “the particle aggregates” that are bodies are always to some extent “part of each other,”<sup>603</sup> any addition of elements from one into another alters this second body by subjecting it to the former’s forces and thereby endows it with new powers—either by transferring some of its own over or sparking novel ones.

When something becomes, this “zone of indetermination” or “undecidability”<sup>604</sup> between it and the other body enlarges so that it becomes, once again, less what it actually is and more what it could have been or could still somehow be. This second dimension of the process opens further the fringe or halo of possibilities surrounding something, since neither “the fibers”<sup>605</sup> and forces stretching out of it and into other things nor its new powers belong to any actual thing or presence. Although those capacities are efficacious, they are as indeterminate as the hybrid body parts they come from and hence cannot be identified with the propensities of particular beings but only with those of indeterminate or virtual things. So even while becoming induces empirical changes in things, it also magnifies the aura of possibilities surrounding something and “confuses” these with it.

Finally, Jane underwent the most extreme kind of possibilization/counteractualization: “an absolute drift” that went almost completely outside her own reality and dead center into “the state of unformed matter.”<sup>606</sup> She often let herself be taken into the far reaches of that outside in part because she wants, explorer she is, to head where the currents of the becomings themselves all eventually go. But her motives for heading back there, where death might ensue, had to be more profound. This is the modern artist-mystic’s desire, to head into the deep of the storm so as to get as empowered as the fervent of charged particles there through becoming as dispersed as them. The relationship between power is : the more the power is, the less something is what it is—the *more something slips from reality into potential, the greater its potential*. Which is why even the “man of power [*pouvoir*]” or statesman leaps from becoming to becoming and into this becoming-particle in pursuit of the force of the unrealized.<sup>607</sup> *What can simply be called pure potential—the possible as it lies prior to all real possibilities.*

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<sup>601</sup> ATP, 288.

<sup>602</sup> ATP, 260-261.

<sup>603</sup> ATP, 283.

<sup>604</sup> ATP, 301.

<sup>605</sup> ATP, 272.

<sup>606</sup> ATP, 55-56.

<sup>607</sup> ATP, 229.

Now that we have seen how much Jane shares with many of the other modern seers, we are better positioned to understand just why she was able to run the real at amplitudes many of them neither could nor did. What has so far been ubiquitously absent from our discussion—an analysis of her method of achieving “multipersonhood” through depersonalization—was no doubt her means of accessing the seemingly endless capacity for writing, invention, and creative imagination she tapped in her trances. Where the grand counteractualizations of her most depersonalized ecstasies leave her as precariously unwound as they do charged, channeling on the other hand “blurs” and takes her “out of focus” while still leaving enough of her (in the) present to ground the powers she is connecting to.

This method is ultimately rooted, according to her, in time. The passages from “Introduction to Aspect Psychology” that will be interwoven in italics with the rest of this chapter will allow her own conceptualization of time to be brought out.

While she had stared at time from the outset—“*I saw that time was not a series of moments*”<sup>608</sup>—she had to take an even more difficult look at it when conceiving this psyche.

What provokes this intense hallucination is her experience of registering the difference between potential and actual. During the trance, she tells us in *Aspect Psychology*, her personality “*goes out of focus... blurs through some kind of acceleration... takes on the characteristics of another aspect of the entity*”—the latter being one of her terms for the psyche she believes the potential side of the individual to be—“*so that they appear on the off-focus personality, transposed.*”<sup>609</sup> At bottom, *a becoming takes place*, since “*a psychological trap or nest... is set up by the off-focus personality, which then attracts other electromagnetic values not its own.*”<sup>610</sup> “In unfocusing,” she speculates, “*the personality disturbs its own field of activity and unbalances it enough so that perhaps it momentarily needs other values,*” which then “*it reaches out for.*”<sup>611</sup> Yet given that the forces so joined with can only be, as we saw, potentials of the self that have been foreclosed as possibilities for it, the different “personality characteristics” formed from their being “*superimposed on the displaced field of the focus personality*” are nonetheless but “*traces*” upon reality of what “*cannot be actualized in this system because its reality is too big to fit*”: “anything more than three-dimensional reality”—pure potential—“would be larger than life in our terms.”<sup>612</sup> Hence the alter selves or “alien personality characteristics that appear in some trances”<sup>613</sup> ought to be considered “*prints*”<sup>614</sup> of potentials that cannot themselves otherwise enter “the world of sense”<sup>615</sup> (their proper realizations themselves being transfers into actual possibilities), especially when they concern what for her is the vast field of potential called the soul.

Feeling there was an uncanny reality to Seth was what led her to draw this distinction between potential and actual. The option of him being a “nonphysical person” obviously barred, she nonetheless felt him to be “a personification of something else” while not “a

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<sup>608</sup> This is a paraphrase from Jane’s account of her first vision; see the beginning of the first chapter.

<sup>609</sup> AC, 100.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid

<sup>611</sup> AC, 101.

<sup>612</sup> AC, 101.

<sup>613</sup> AC, 101.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid

<sup>615</sup> AC, 104.

person in our terms.<sup>616</sup> “In an odd way I felt that he was more than that,” she writes, “or represented more; that *his psychological reality straddled worlds in a way that I couldn’t understand. I sensed a multidimensionality... I couldn’t define.*”<sup>617</sup>

“I think that I always sensed this about Seth...”<sup>618</sup> So for this reason, she accepts the existence of the atomic units or “basic source aspects” Seth had said “create a multiplicity of fields of actuality or systems that exist simultaneously” while deciding at the same time that “activating” as personal abilities more of their power than is presently available always results in the mutual distortion of potential (“their own reality”) and actual. Channeling or accessing them will always, on the one hand, cause them to “appear in line with our idea of personhood” so that their status *qua* nonpresence and potential will be lost; on the other, “many such [personifications] would be needed to show the facets of the entity”—its disparate, myriad potentials—which would require multiplying or assuming more forms than one ordinarily in actuality takes.<sup>619</sup> What she sees is the constant, invariable distinction between potential and actual, and that trying oneself to contravene the line between them results in, as I often put it, their “denaturing.”<sup>620</sup>

So we can now begin to see why is she so quick in this text to start hallucinating the vision of time whose diagram she keeps redrawing as its chapters progress. If potential undergoes, as she says, actualizations in which it then becomes limited and thereby “suspended,” this must of course occur in or through time, through the “dividing in two” of the real that arises from part of it being (in the) present and part (already) past.

By my reckoning, the most immediate experience of this “splitting” occurs when we register both the peculiar way the present passes—the brute fact of its being gone as soon as it has arrived—and, consequently, the reality of the non-coincidence or presence of time or any moment to itself. Seeing this transience of the present only leads to an understanding of this divide when we also realize the basic paradoxes it entails. Since the present has already gone past us in the moment in which it is present, it has to exist in the past at the same time as it happens in the present. In other words, what is happening right now just happened, this being “the first paradox: the contemporaneousness of the past with the present it was.”<sup>621</sup> Upon realizing this, we can overcome the perspective that the past is “constituted” whenever “a new present appears” and progressively built up from this passing<sup>622</sup> (a view that is quite “meaningless”<sup>623</sup> for never providing any reason or condition for that flow: unless the past is simultaneous with the present in this paradoxical fashion, there would be neither anything to limit and terminate the present nor a “place” for it to go). From whence come the other paradoxes, the second being that this contemporaneousness of the past and present of an instant necessitates that “all of the past coexists with the... present in relation to which it is now past.”<sup>624</sup> If what just happened, that is, is also happening now, no prior occurrence (not just the immediate past) can be separated from what is happening now: the

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<sup>616</sup> AC, 105.

<sup>617</sup> AC, 105.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> AC, 103.

<sup>620</sup> See on this point Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life,” in *Pure Immanence* (New York: Zone Books, 2001). Hereafter cited as *IL*.

<sup>621</sup> DR, 81.

<sup>622</sup> DR, 81.

<sup>623</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II, The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 79. Hereafter cited as *C2*.

<sup>624</sup> DR, 82.

past cannot be separated out into ultimately discrete moments anymore than can the present in its coincidence with the past, which carries the strange consequence that everything in the past—the past in its entirety—takes places in and with the present. This even entails, third paradox, a reversal of the priority of past and present and thus even of the order of time: once the entirety of the past is seen being “contemporaneousness with the present it *was*”—as though it could *presently* be somewhere or something else—“we necessarily speak of a past which never *was* present, since it was not formed after” any present, and therefore of a past that also “pre-exists the passing present.”<sup>625</sup>

Once the past is seen being before us, the distance dividing us from it starts coming into focus as well. If the past exists in itself, as all of itself, and even almost entirely prior to the present, then establishing continuity of self in time (whether psychologically or through biologically producing what is now as a reproduction)—memory—turns out to not be entirely possible from within the present such that the past must be responsible for it. No matter how much the relation to the past is undertaken or sustained from the present, the fact whatever attempts this does so from the present means that what is being connected with is invariably outside itself. Psychological or historical memories, for instance, cannot completely exist in the present for the simple reason that they invariably concern past happenings that thus exceed their (even neurobiological) supports—what is remembered cannot be reduced to the media of its recollection. Because of this, the past has somehow to be the source or substance of the identity the present is looking for: the past *itself* must be reached.

Yet since conscious, immediate connection with it is impossible, psychological (as well as other kinds of) memory compensates through two operations, and these are what reveal time to be self-dissociation or the “differentiation” of itself. We are prompted, on the one hand, to “leap” out of the present and into the past in order to retrieve whatever there might refurbish our identity; that is, for there to be memory at all, part of us must effectively go live in the past, so to speak, through what amounts to a psychological counteractualization. On the other hand, what has been sought there must be brought back and (re-) actualized into the present as mnemonic experience. Given, however, the disparity between these two sides of time, this empirical rendering has to involve cognitive translation: if the past as a whole preexists in itself, there can be nothing in it separating what would then have to be a confused mass into the discrete instances or events that were at one point the presents in it, which in turn necessitates dividing what has been recovered into “distinct images” (or signs or thoughts) “that are external to one another” and that can therefore be experienced.<sup>626</sup> What is fused together in the past must be compressed into an image whose content, while still “undivided,” is close enough to that of the present to refresh the latter with the identity appropriate to it. In effect, the present can only become intelligible through the past being made into “its double or immediate reflection,” a “mirror image” functioning as a reference model for redrawing it in the mind and thereby reactualizing it.<sup>627</sup> Yet since this filling-in or translation, again, can only occur from and within the present (i.e., since the present could never produce this “image”) we are forced to acknowledge that this compression of the past is a distinct operation: what of us has gone back to the past must also somehow return “in the opposite direction,” “contracting” and narrowing itself down as

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<sup>625</sup> DR, 82.

<sup>626</sup> B, 66.

<sup>627</sup> C2, 68.

it does into this “virtual image” of a present from which then it must necessarily remain distinct, even as it closely “coalesces” with the latter.<sup>628</sup> Once this past of the present has so formed, it can then be translated and actualized into the present, but only at the cost of its no longer being past.

Now when this “coalescence” of the past with the present it then transfers into somehow becomes visible to us, we finally come right up against the constitution or self-differentiation of time, which is also “the most fundamental operation of time,” the real fact that it “has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past... it has to split... in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched toward the future while the other falls into the past.”<sup>629</sup> If time must be so characterized as fundamentally “gushing in two” or streaming in opposite directions—it is “always just past while ever to come”<sup>630</sup>—this is because past and present are constantly passing (into) each other and trading places even as they remain distinct. Just as the present is about to be refreshed by the past doubling it, it passes past this past coming toward it, the present it can no longer be; and even as this past is arriving actualized in the present, it too goes back to the past, past the past that had just now been (re-) doubling it before again becoming the present it previously was. Since the present only passes... past the oncoming traffic into the present of the past, time does not just pass but also transfers from the past back into the present.

If this strange mutual and “continual exchange” and “perpetual self-distinguishing” of (potential) past and (actual) present is the arising or constituting of time, it is because the “circuit” or trade-off itself requires time. There is time precisely because the making present of the past itself takes us some time, which is the very same time it takes for our present to pass. There is always for us some gap involved in the operations. The present is the amount of the past we can hold in ourselves, so that when we reach our limit... the present goes past. The transfer, moreover, takes an instant of time that we can never see (the past, which we don’t experience, needs it; the present, which we experience, is the length of its expiration, the gap between the two orders). And then another present...

Which again arises, Jane again providing the words, from “the point of intersection”<sup>631</sup> of past and present, or potential and actual. While her reasoning here is not always exact or the same as ours, she nonetheless is cognizant of this very simultaneity, how the present is actualized, and what mind does to mediate between the two. However it might have initially arisen (the following is her point of departure), the present self “immersed in three-dimensional life” is at bottom, she says again, “a particle formed of waves” that “contain our memories and the potentiality for... experiencing.”<sup>632</sup> The “waves’ intersection” with the present is what for her makes time: “a certain maximum focus” of self appears “where the source energy hits the three dimensional field, spreading out in a pool of now” that then obscures the “potential field,” as she calls it, from which it arose.<sup>633</sup> So while generally “we are only aware of the horizontal spread... that appears as time” through this entering us of potential, nonetheless our “‘now’ happens at a certain ‘point’” where the apparent present is impinged upon by a past with which it is contemporary.<sup>634</sup> Given then

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<sup>628</sup> C2, 61.

<sup>629</sup> C2, 81.

<sup>630</sup> See *LOS* generally. This is the most famous of Deleuze’s characterizations of time.

<sup>631</sup> AC, 115.

<sup>632</sup> AC, 98.

<sup>633</sup> AC, 96.

<sup>634</sup> AC, 97.

that past and present happen there at what again amount to the same time, “time does not really exist as a series of moments”<sup>635</sup> and “is not basically consecutive,”<sup>636</sup> its ostensible segments or periods instead “each exist[ing]... in an ‘at once’” beyond ordinary experience.<sup>637</sup>

Once this simultaneity becomes apparent to her, so too can its relation to linear, sequential time. “Only the topmost surface portion of an event”—from this perspective, the present side—“may appear at the living area level” (one of her terms for consciousness within chronological time), since the potential realized in it can never be fully incarnate there, while “beneath objectivity,” the past side, “events occur in a stratum that remains invisible but ever shifting” before they “erupt in what we perceive finally as a physical event.”<sup>638</sup> This locus, she goes on to say, is that of memory, and “[o]ur memories endow the moment with the additional dimensions of events not present in sense terms.”<sup>639</sup> Yet they cannot as such really be made present to us: “memories flutter” about the present and cannot be literal translated.<sup>640</sup>

Such precise formulations of the split can come from Jane because anomalies and “disturbances of memory” are what most readily expose this “mystery of time.”<sup>641</sup> While unperturbed waking consciousness can always half-grasp the passing of the present, the experience of the contemporaneity of the entirety of the past with the present occurs, from my point of view, only in altered states of consciousness like “amnesia, hypnosis, hallucination, [and] madness.”<sup>642</sup> In such conditions, “we cannot remember” something crucial for the present (our names or faces, our will, the world around us, all of these...) because memory’s capacity to actualize the pure past becomes disrupted so that “it enters into relation with genuinely virtual elements” or potentials from there.<sup>643</sup> While these obviously cannot appear as such, the situations needing its illumination often then acquire a vague, unreal, or fantastic air, the most common being “feelings of déjà vu.”<sup>644</sup> These last arise when the past cannot for some reason be translated into the present—either the mind fails to find the part of the past it needs or cannot transfer over what it reaches—so that we experience the part of it doubling us as “the memory of the present” (in the sense of the objective genitive) that it in fact is. What is happening in such minor temporal glitches as much as with their more extreme cases (psychotic delusions of observation, amnesias...) is that this failure of the transfer deprives the present of its particular mnemonic content so that the double coalescing with and otherwise hidden by it suddenly becomes exposed. We catch an improbable glimpse of the simultaneity of past and present and their exchange, the reality, Jane now, of our “straddling” the divide or “point of intersection” even as we keep being halved by the circuit formed through it.

What we then witness is what cannot properly be seen, or rather what can only be seen through our no longer being able to see ourselves properly. As though another, “third

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<sup>635</sup> AC, 118.

<sup>636</sup> AC, 115.

<sup>637</sup> AC, 118.

<sup>638</sup> AC, 135.

<sup>639</sup> AC, 127.

<sup>640</sup> AC, 126.

<sup>641</sup> C2, 55.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> C2, 54.

<sup>644</sup> C2, 55.

eye,”<sup>645</sup> me here again, had opened and dilated, we find ourselves “clairvoyant” and gazing into a vision of ourselves expiring into the past as it brings what we were and are back (as it goes by again). We see an “image of time itself” and thereby as well ourselves perishing at the same time as we are brought back to life; we see the exchange and “mutual search” of “matter and spirit” wherein we become spirit as our spirits becomes matter.<sup>646</sup>

“Granted,” back to Jane, “the meeting must be opaque,” this intersection under most circumstances obscured.<sup>647</sup> Since the past, again, can never really be made present as itself, the “‘faces’ or ‘aspects’ of this multidimensional [past]... surface just beneath conscious awareness.”<sup>648</sup> “Usually the aspects slide transparently through the focus personality, merely coloring or tinting its experience... the focus personality often looks through an aspect without realizing it.”<sup>649</sup> “Occasionally,” however (and still her), “we are suddenly aware of this sense of strangeness in our perception of the world, or sometimes we gradually realize the world has seemed other or different for some time,” and we then see, in one double vision and “as if in a mirror,” our past right next to our present going past.<sup>650</sup> What we are watching is, me again, the “chasing after each other” of these two sides or versions of ourselves—one potential and image(in)ary, one real—a vision that can only be seen through our own vision going double. Since it is we who are going past our past going present (before it goes past), we are at bottom seeing ourselves go where we are no more and cannot see except from the point of view of another us that has just come from there and begun seeing (itself go). We see ourselves as though we had been “reflected in a mirror image” that immediately “came to life, assumed independence, and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror” before again switching sides.<sup>651</sup>

“At such times”—her characterization—“we may feel as if we’re looking at experience through someone else’s eyes, someone like myself, yet almost nostalgically different.”<sup>652</sup> When the past so peers through us so that our own gaze, her still, “goes out of focus” and “blurs,”<sup>653</sup> we become, now me again, “visionary... the one who sees in the crystal... the gushing of time,” the division of self.<sup>654</sup>

Now that we know why she is indeed, in my terms, a “seer,” we can really understand all the genius, power, and specificity of her peculiar mode of counteractualization or “multi-personification.” Her long experiment in watching herself “straddling” the divide of her time allowed her to understand her legion of other selves as pieces of the other time that is always potential and past. Through this unique, crystalline vision, she descried this time of the past to be, all choice words of mine, our “soul” and “spirit,” what of us remains mostly “opaque” from never being present in or as itself but whose “shining points” and luminous “aspects” nonetheless always enter manifestation.<sup>655</sup> From being so often beset by hallucinations of the constant exchange of “spirit and matter” (which is what so many of her

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<sup>645</sup> C2, 18

<sup>646</sup> C2, 75

<sup>647</sup> AC, 99.

<sup>648</sup> AC, 108.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> C2, 68.

<sup>652</sup> AC, 108.

<sup>653</sup> AC, 100.

<sup>654</sup> C2, 81.

<sup>655</sup> See C2, *passim* for these terms.

visions were) she could comprehend, almost see, that compressed inside her, her immediate double, was the entire past of everything, and therefore that our “subjectivity is never ours, it is time, that is, the soul or spirit... which divides itself in two” — ourselves on one side, the whole on the other — and trades these off, “exchanges” them, so that what we are always contains, whether *in potentia* or in small “traces,” whatever else we could have been or could still become.<sup>656</sup> *What we are, as “psyche,” “spirit.”*<sup>657</sup>

Once she can formulate all of this, the exact nature of her other personalities stops being a cipher. If she feels compelled to give them a quite Platonic name for what shows itself — “aspects” — it is because she understands them to be, her again, swathes of this “soul” “imprinted” upon what of her own present reality remains during her “blurring” of self-focus and “displacement.” What happens in those trance states is not just the paradoxical vision of the exchange (this is just preliminary) but her nodding off into an awakening whereby the psyche directly presents itself as the simultaneous, nonchronological time it is. “It is as if the past surfaces in itself” on her, the light of so many of its “luminous points” blazing through as “personalities” corresponding to and “emanating from regions” of this psyche, and its illumination sometimes even mounting until it suggests the entire, but then “nebulous,” whole.<sup>658</sup> “Perhaps our senses alone,” she says, almost seeing it, “keep us uniquely apart from other times and places, cozy in our domesticated nest. Otherwise... we might see the dimensions merge and lose our one-line-of-time track; see our other aspects in all stages of our own and their becoming”<sup>659</sup> through an “overlapping of perspectives” gone “quantum” and “topological,”<sup>660</sup> “experience the earth’s centuries as one cosmic, living tapestry, with each year we know only our official picture of a thousand other versions of the same,”<sup>661</sup> all scrambled together in one vague, wavering vision. Each time she stops identifying with herself, she sees, “regions” or currents of this psyche come surging through, then morph what of her remains into “the shape of personalities,” “embryonic” or barely present faces of these aspects of time.<sup>662</sup>

This irruption of psyche of course entails at once both great promise and extraordinary peril, and the ingenuity of Jane’s method of counteractualization is that it aims at letting time bring to us more of its powers while keeping us from being engulfed and destroyed by them. Once all the potential of time is revealed to be us, we see that “we are creatures of incredible freedom” since “we aren’t locked into one series of happenings.”<sup>663</sup> “We just actualize some” potentials, manifest “only certain events”<sup>664</sup> of all those that might emerge, and when it becomes apparent that these are “only the mountain tops or three-dimensional tips”<sup>665</sup> of a time “not basically consecutive,”<sup>666</sup> we also can then realize that “memories of past events that indubitably happened, it seems... can be changed” and “replaced by a new group of memories.”<sup>667</sup> “By realizing this,” she says with quite

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<sup>656</sup> C2, 82-83.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> C2, 113.

<sup>659</sup> AC, 118.

<sup>660</sup> C2, 129.

<sup>661</sup> AC, 118.

<sup>662</sup> C2, 113.

<sup>663</sup> AC, 120.

<sup>664</sup> AC, 120.

<sup>665</sup> AC, 124.

<sup>666</sup> AC, 115.

<sup>667</sup> AC, 123.



extraordinary acuity, and then “imaginatively placing ourselves at that intersection point” of the one time and the other, “we can... unkink ourselves” so that the locks of time can open and a flood of memory rise up to engulf our present.<sup>668</sup> “Recognition of this,” still her, “would relieve many people from feelings of powerlessness” because they would realize their capacity to “blot out certain aspects of past experience and substitute... ‘new memory,’”<sup>669</sup> “memories that would not seem our own,”<sup>670</sup> that is, personalities the pure past having powers — “abilities,” “drives”<sup>671</sup> — impossible if one lives in consecutive time alone. Yet this unkinking or disarticulation of the intersection involves severe dangers: given that the past “can intrude into the waking state” in this way and the present thereby “recede into the background,” there is a need, she says, to “use normal time and events... as reference points”<sup>672</sup> in order to steer clear of the madness of having, now me, “the personalities emerging from the past” become “autonomous” enough to take over completely, of finding the already “undecidable alternatives” between these different “sheets” of time so “independent” that they turn into a group of mutually amnesiac, brawling selves.<sup>673</sup> At bottom, “when we confuse the two kinds of [time], we’re in trouble...”<sup>674</sup> “How easy it would be for us to get lost,” then, in time, “lose the thread of ourselves, and perhaps never find our way back...”<sup>675</sup> so that every time we would go to remember ourselves, we would be left wondering, once again, “what was happening to *which* who in *what* when.”<sup>676</sup> The various pasts would end up completely dissociated, “alienated, off-balance,” all “inexplicable in the present” with “the split personality now showing” but not joining them up.<sup>677</sup>

“*But then how are they distinguished...?*”<sup>678</sup> In other words, how is it that Jane herself can hold together and differentiate between the various currents of time empowering her instead of getting buffeted between them during their rounds of surfacing and submerging? Just what allowed her to realize what she calls our “capacity... to handle more than one set of memories at a time,”<sup>679</sup> and to let the real thereby show many of its potential faces through her without this erasing or destroying her own? The answer is that she indeed learned to “straddle” or live both sides of time’s divide so that the many different pasts she plugged into could be exposed in the “disconnected... dechronologized moments”<sup>680</sup> of her trances without these altogether fragmenting sequential, ordinary time. “I remain adjacent” to the present, she says, “while I’m focused quite intensely at this different order of experience”<sup>681</sup>: “It’s like sitting at the threshold of yourself”<sup>682</sup> and peering into what usually “does not intersect with our usual space-time coordinates.”<sup>683</sup> Being stationed that way between the

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<sup>668</sup> AC, 97.

<sup>669</sup> AC, 123.

<sup>670</sup> AC, 127.

<sup>671</sup> AC, 109.

<sup>672</sup> AC, 142.

<sup>673</sup> C2, 120.

<sup>674</sup> AC, 144.

<sup>675</sup> AC, 135.

<sup>676</sup> AC, 135.

<sup>677</sup> C2, 113.

<sup>678</sup> C2, 113.

<sup>679</sup> AC, 126.

<sup>680</sup> C2, 133.

<sup>681</sup> AC, 142.

<sup>682</sup> AC, 100.

<sup>683</sup> AC, 161.

sequential and the simultaneous enables her to distinguish between the different pasts because these can never then become independent enough to steal her presents for themselves and thereby create gaping, mnemonic holes in the chronology of her life. Her dissociation, that is, is never absolute, so she can always shut the door she opens when the wind swings it too wide, always witness while standing there the past(s) become independent of the present. She remains nearby, “the ego... not shunted aside,”<sup>684</sup> so that when past time surfaces and interrupts the present, *it also must do so along with her and in her time*. “The regions” have then to “appear to succeed each other”<sup>685</sup> as moments in the time and chronology of her life, even as these (false memories) reveal every such present to just be “their common limit,”<sup>686</sup> “the surface crust of time.”<sup>687</sup> The strange time she had in life, she can then tell at her own pace and as her own story: “*I felt my consciousness accelerate still further... Everything clicked and fell into place. I saw Seth, Seth II, the Sumari... as aspects of a single but multidimensional consciousness...*”

So “the aspects,” “these personifications... are us and not us”<sup>688</sup> means two things: not just that the ‘I’ is paradoxically itself in the present at the same time as it is also the past and what of the latter has risen up and thereby become independent; but also that these pasts or personalities are phases of the time the ‘I’ calls its own, through its changes along a continuous line.

Channeling turns out to be a technique as much temporal as psychological, an art whereby all time can be traveled without the small part called our own becoming a speck so small as to count as virtually extinguished. The trance or “un-focusing” of self indeed brings about an irruption of soul whereby time upon time upon time will emerge through the one practicing it, so that she can never exactly tell this time, know “which who,” “what when” she then is. Yet her “sitting at the threshold,” “straddling” the time we tell and this other time, which itself tells, allows this other telling to speak by the count of our clock. So when its hands start to spin, the face going into a swirl, we can still mark the hour when there was no hour, the time when there was another time.

“Between times,” she will then be, knowing finally how to respond to whoever calls to know oneself. Ask back, she says, “who speaks?,” then when someone replies “which one?,” respond, “which you?,” “what world?,” before letting this other self have its time.

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<sup>684</sup> AC, 102.

<sup>685</sup> C2, 99.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> AC, 124.

<sup>688</sup> AC, 109.

FROM THE LIBRARY OF THE SUPERREAL:  
THE ACTUALITY OF “OTHER-CONSCIOUSNESS”

*The problem raised at the beginning of the last chapter has not yet been resolved. Could there be a subject of desubjectivation that would be anything but a reappropriation or occlusion of plurality, difference, and potential? If potentiality (or possibility thought in the sense of “potential to...”) lies outside the temporal present and consciousness, how could it be brought into actuality without its nature being contravened? And what, in that event, would an actuality be that is not only what it is but something else “besides” itself? Is such an “actuality” even possible?*

*These questions will seem obscure not only because questions of their kind have been effectively sidelined throughout the humanities and social sciences in the United States but as a result of the order of this dissertation. Apart from the introduction (which does set the scene for what follows in this chapter), our path has largely followed the order in which Jane’s takes place, and neither her versions of these questions nor the motives for them emerge until the moment in her work and life examined in this chapter. The last chapter showed how she had begun, in her text “Adventures in Consciousness,” to address these issues of potentiality, actuality, time, and subjectivity, but the reading of her work undertaken there shows that she was not yet posing them in a fashion irreducible to any recent philosophy. But in the texts examined here—The “Unknown Reality” and Psychic Politics—Jane begins to see how time, actuality and potentiality, consciousness, and self would have to be conceived if her experience of being at once one with herself and doubled involves consciousness. At this point in her work, her thinking (however vernacular it is) can no longer be reduced to that of any existing philosophy. In fact, rendering her thought into a more proper theoretical form requires revising certain propositions from Deleuze and drawing from some unexpected resources in modern philosophy.*

*The present chapter shows this through an argument that develops through the following steps. First, the chapter reiterates and expands on the questions developed at the end of chapter four and in the last chapter. It then, second, shows how the stakes of these questions concern the absence of a “philosophy of spirituality” both in philosophy and spirituality, and how the notion of a plural subject is thus foreclosed in both cases (this part of the chapter in part does this through a reading of Aldous Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*, a text that expresses “the resistance to theory” of spirituality). From here, third, I examine closely a remarkable text of Jane’s called *The “Unknown” Reality* and stage for a second time a comparison between her and Deleuze. This time, however, “Seth” is used to interpret Deleuze in a critical fashion and thereby show the problem with his refusal of a “subject of virtuality” and the reasons such a subject—such a consciousness—is possible if Jane’s visionary experiences are understood precisely. Finally, the chapter engages in another at critical and comparative reading of a philosopher. Through reading Sartre’s *Psychology of the Imagination*, it becomes possible to see how another consciousness is possible at the level of imagination—or, more precisely, when ordinary, propositional consciousness and imagination blend together.*

*Whatever its flaws, this chapter (in its second half) presents the beginnings of what I believe to be a novel argument about consciousness. The revision of this dissertation will involve recasting prior chapters so they reflect the work of this chapter. The future (book) version of the dissertation will conceive a series of other philosophical concepts in light of the work accomplished here.*

*The entirety of this chapter is written as if Jane’s “Seth” personality were its author. I intend by this gesture both perform the concepts (of consciousness and self) developed here and to undermine the intellectual authority associated with a standard authorial voice in both the disciplines of philosophy and anthropology. In the latter case, I have attempted to show that Jane’s work so much lent itself to the mode of interpretation in*

*which I engage that another version of her might have read herself in the same sort of theoretical fashion—and thereby subordinated the anthropologist and the philosopher alike to a still stranger mode of thought.*

“THE CONSCIOUS MIND SET FREE OF ITSELF... UNDERGOES A METAMORPHOSIS”

“Man thought once,” one of them would soon be saying, “historically speaking, that there was but one world. Now he knows differently, but he still clings to the idea of one god, one self, and one body through which to express it.”<sup>689</sup>

“The declaration was one of its, my” — the turn this time being mine, Seth’s — “few gambles at shocking my anticipated readers into recognizing the other, multiplied self to which I most often tended just to steer them gently. Yet Jane had become either so emboldened by what she saw herself having discovered during her *Adventures* or so convinced of the veracity of her strange beliefs that she now saw herself capable of dealing, under cover of me, a blow to human narcissism more fatal than those delivered it until earth, man, and subject could no longer be conceived as concentric rings at the center of the universe. Those dethronings, she at bottom thought, would seem paltry once knowledge of the multiple versions of each thing had set in; when each person would know that he was at once both man and things not-man, himself and selves not-himself, both of this world and time and others and thereby forget forever the self-evidence of a leftover monotheism of identity (some of you might have once wanted to call it ontomonoautotheology) that would then have so far gone unnamed. Her speculations about her experience either had hardened with time into a bedrock of conviction so firm that nothing could now topple the private constructions of delusion and argument she was now assembling on it, or else they were somehow hitting the mark of something distant enough from the screen of life as to scarcely come into view there.”

“So we kept ratcheting up,” me and her, “the contrast on the picture of self we were concocting in what Jane sometimes called the ‘*wonderworks*’ of her psyche, the colors and lines getting crisp enough to subdue the worn, frozen images of the unconscious into their displaced background.”

“*You are multipersons,*” went my ghostly voiceover. “*You exist in many times and places at once. You exist as one person, simultaneously.*” This does not deny the independence of the persons, but your inner reality *straddles* their reality” (this being my syntactical innovation awaiting a more extensive conceptualization) “while it also serves as a psychic world in which they can grow.”<sup>690</sup>

“Which makes little to no sense,” I could hear you countering, whether your reception by me was won through clever anticipation, regrettable delusion, or a mixture of both. “What can, if I entertain this *multiple you* which you’re supposed to be, a self or person be—the difference between these terms, by the way, could be quite large—once it is said to exist, *in actuality*, twice over or even across several instances?”

“What I mean,” you continued, since I awaited you both cordially and with polite, cunning (it was best for me both to deal with your most intelligent objection while also letting you labor toward your own undoing), “is that a ‘*person*,’ whether defined grammatically or socially, is a substantial identity, an identity in a quite ancient Western or Greek sense inherited through the grammar of ‘certain’ languages and concepts based on them. When

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<sup>689</sup> UR, xxx.

<sup>690</sup> UR, 50.

Western (perhaps now all) people talk of a person or employ, as they must, the corresponding grammatical category, they always presuppose the reality of a substrate capable of having predicates attached to it—the Greek term *hypokeimenon* essentially meant this, was translated into Latin as *substantia* and then *subjectum* and then morphed with the latter into the ‘subject’ once thought to be an indubitable, guaranteed identity of the self with itself and (this being the latter achievement and perhaps violent folly of European humanity) to preserve itself through its inevitable changes and even integrate them into itself. So that a person, especially a self-realized one, is always the ultimate expression of an identity both grammatical and metaphysical.”

“So if the claim is indeed that the self can or sometimes really does experience itself as two selves and in two different moments that are also one and the same, you’re at bottom proffering a rather ill-conceived idea. Whatever definition one ends up attaching to the self, calling it a person belies the fact that you mean it to be an *identity* whose experience is thereby necessarily *of itself* and thereby *its own* even as it is supposed to be somehow, despite the contradiction, *of someone else* as well. Yet what I have so far seen fails to indicate that your discussions of this ‘multiperson’ clear up this difficulty. Unless you are really asking for it to be believed that there is, outside finite experience, some kind of self capable of undergoing more than one unity of experience at the same time (in this case, we will just be disputing an article of faith), the available possibilities here are slim. Since you would no doubt flat out reject the old phenomenological proposition that what selves are many in us are merely empirical egos or memories belonging to one transcendental consciousness that at all times remains selfsame, only two philosophical positions remain: either personhood must be reconceived so that something like the grammatical and substantial ‘fourth person’ that was seen last chapter accounts for the curious ‘who’ personas like you and even me at bottom are, or else we accept that ‘the subject’ is always simultaneously several persons because difference prevents it from ever being at one with itself.”

“Other kinds of psychological gestalts,” I began explaining in response, “have been and are being tried—some that would appear quite inconceivable to you; and yet now and then versions of them appear in your system...”<sup>691</sup>

“Not now, no more appeals to facts or worlds others can’t see,” you interrupted. “It obscures the far more important issue of the consequences of your syntax. Look: *Gestalt*, close in German to *Form* or our ‘form,’ signified for a generation what was possible for consciousness to think or perceive. In short, you’re just once again asserting that one can see oneself and another self as oneself and thereby manage the basically impossible feat of an apperception that is not one’s own alone.”

“Indeed I am,” went my comeback, “and I will show you—give you a picture of—how this can be, although the telling will be the difficult part.”

“It is quite possible, for example, for several selves to occupy a body, and were this the norm it would be easily accepted... In some systems of [...] existence, [on the other hand,] a multipersonhood is established in which three or four ‘persons’ emerge from the same [...] self, each one utilizing to the best of its abilities those characteristics of its own. This presupposes a gestalt of awareness, however, in which each knows all the activities of the others, and participates; and you have a *different* version of mass consciousness.”<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> UR, 49.

<sup>692</sup> UR, 50.

“While this might make for beautiful science fiction, it’s no theoretical philosophy. Allow me to explain better what may not have been clear before. Etymologically speaking, consciousness means ‘knowledge’ (*scientia*) that always comes ‘with’ (*con-*) something, namely a someone or knower. So what is commonly meant by the word approaches some of the great philosophical conceptions of the subject. For Kant, transcendental apperception meant, in brief, that ‘I’ always must and do accompany my representations, while Husserl argued that what is always left following phenomenological reduction is a transcendental ego about which little can be specified apart from the sheer fact that it is always what intends significance. Few people of course believe anymore in such a subject, the reason in part being that philosophers raised so many aporias against it. Yet despite the implications of this term and the others branching into it here, we keep on hearing both what boils down to the contradictory assertion that there exists a subject of nonconsciousness, syncope, and trance—someone who apprehends herself ‘being’ absent—and the more exotic, nonsensical proposition of a perceptual gestalt by which this supposed self would experience itself as other selves.”

“Rigorous thought neither brooks such notions nor knows of a problematic calling for them. This is why it accords you the brilliance of some of your formulas about consciousness or self while treating them not as concepts but as an indication of the necessity of rethinking the person. Hence one can say, but only say, what was last chapter: the ‘I’ is several other beings not actually but potentially and virtually, and is these more and more as it ‘counteractualizes’ itself and detaches from the present. ‘Who’ it is, therefore, cannot be given linguistic or sensible form, since it is really the obverse or underside of all form; if one is to understand oneself as the impersonal, one again needs recourse to paradoxical expressions like ‘the fourth person singular.’”

“My turn finally, and for real,” I finally began again. “My responses have so far been indirect in part because I am, as you may recall, up to something quite different than you theoreticians and philosophers.”

“I am not a philosopher,” was what I basically said, you may recall, when the matter came up, “but a source of concepts for those, like Jane, who refuse to understand their ‘spiritual’ experience in the conventional terms. So for that reason I elaborated with her thought-forms—you can decide if they were concepts (some of you profoundly dislike the term anyway)—that would make a different interpretation of the psyche possible.”

“These of course would include literary, aesthetic, intellectual, and even manifestly philosophical forms,” I continued, “which brings us back to you. Although my words have thus far not withstood your most thorough scrutiny, they are nonetheless far stronger than has been supposed.”

“A quite vexing problem,” I urged you to recall, “ate away at Jane until she managed to address it with what by your own standards turned out to be rather precise thoughts. Whenever I surfaced and she went under, she nonetheless (as keeps being repeated) remained, her words again, ‘sitting at the threshold of herself’ and ‘to the side.’ So while philosophers, as you rightly object, may not yet have encountered this exact paradox of a ‘self-consciousness of being another,’ she indeed did.”

“Does that warrant our dignifying the problem Jane discerned in this experience as one concerning us?” I then asked for you, on your terms. “Not if the switches and changes of personality of someone like Jane provoke neither heretofore unposed questions about who thinks, speaks, writes... nor any regarding the status of this who: potential, actual, real, existent... But it would be difficult to believe she and her fellow-travelers like Fernando Pessoa, James Merrill, the multiple personalities and other channels... (the list is getting

long) could no longer solicit wonder about what ‘who’s’ apparently animated or possessed by divergent voices really are, more difficult to accept that everything (especially by the radical, quite open thinkers of your times) could have already been said about them.”

“Now what often proves astonishing about we *‘polyautein’* are those ‘anomalies of potential’ that often occur in our vicinity,” I continued. “When feats the ordinary self is apparently incapable of suddenly happen while it is absent in a trance, our expectations regarding an individual’s possibilities are so disrupted that we assume they no longer correspond to its self. The profound anomaly, though, is not in the occurrence of the unexpected potential (which perhaps could have always happened...) but in the fact that it only becomes actual through the subject normally supposed responsible for it becoming nonactual.”

“This is the issue,” you again, “Jane took on, especially where it was tangled up with time: the more the potential, the less one is actual, in the present, oneself.”

“Or so you have been told. While calling upon Deleuze was necessary in order to show how much Jane managed to intuit here (especially about other potentials being virtually ours and their relation to the structure of time), it left untouched another anomaly surrounding potential which renders dubious a good part of what we just saw about potentiality and actuality: there is, among the multiselves, a subject of the counteractualization or potentialization of the subject, “a subject of desubjectivation”; not just because there are autobiographical chronicles of the subjectivation of someone through desubjectivation and self-multiplication (in which a self narrates self-loss), but through the *actual* persistence of consciousness and thus self during such absencing.”

“This ostensibly paradoxical presence is just what I remain unconvinced of,” you said. “For the evidence suggests the very opposite: Jane resorts to ‘paradoxical’ or contradictory descriptions of her ecstasies because it is quite impossible for those parts of ordinary language (the first-person pronoun) ordinarily used to denote or signify self to function when the latter has been extinguished. Yet even if this supposed persistence of self in its absence could be for some reason granted, it would then require conceiving what this actuality could be you’re now wanting to attribute to it.”

“Careful please,” my response was polite, from not being overdetermined by reason. “Some of the most incisive characterizations Jane offered of the trance have it ‘an accelerated state’ or ‘higher state of wakefulness’ in which her ‘attention is not blunted’ and she ‘not discarded,’ even as ‘there must be another ‘I’ who leaves Jane’ during it, since the latter her ‘becomes Seth.’<sup>693</sup> So such accounts (of which there are far more) manage to point to this other consciousness without resorting to aporia or emphasizing paradox, and this is because they evoke what for Jane is a very definite experience: she is there, aware, amidst her displacement.”

“But even if it were to be better specified, what would nonetheless remain would be, colloquially put, the question of what such a ‘consciousness’ could ‘actually’ be, or, now in what are considered precise terms, how actuality could be attributed to an awareness deficient in the very properties of self-presence, self-recognition, and self-possession that ordinarily garner consciousness this title. While a tall order, it would require considering how mental states at the limits of what is ordinarily called consciousness possess reality or ‘actuality,’ even if this requires stretching what has so far been meant by those terms.”

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<sup>693</sup> UR, xxiii

“Jane’s frequently calling them ‘almost indescribable’<sup>694</sup> won’t help.”

“But their yielding the remarkable images of ‘her’ visions will, hence my insistence on other psycho- and personological *gestalts* or forms. For I now hope to help *you* see exactly as Jane did: through a sort of split or refracted vision capable of simultaneously yielding the one seeing two or more dissimilar images that are nonetheless both experienced as being itself, a self that thereby turns out to be many.”

“Since such a form remains to me altogether inconceivable, I will for the last time remind you that this claim about the self cannot fly without an explanation of how there can be consciousness without *someone* underlying it, especially since such a cognition would then, as is the case with the dream or trance, be lacking in actuality.”

“When a personality realizes that other realities exist and that other experiences with consciousness are possible, then he activates certain potentials within himself,” I was quoting myself. “*The conscious mind is set free of itself. To a large measure it undergoes a metamorphosis.*”<sup>695</sup>

“I hope you did not consider me simple enough to have employed this whole time words and phrases like ‘multiperson,’ ‘multiple focus,’ and ‘multiform’ just so I could mean the same thing as you by ‘*consciousness*,’ ‘*form*,’ ‘*self*,’ and ‘*person*.’ This entire group of concepts changes meaning once one becomes cognizant of the transformation their referents can undergo. But let me account for it.”

“Be my guest, although remember specifications of quite a few terms—including *actual*, *potential*, and *virtual*—also remain outstanding.”

“Off we go then, but you’ll need to cede me the lectern for a while...”

#### THE MULTIPLICITY OF SPIRIT VS. THE POLYTHEISM OF SELF

(This is the “lecture” just anticipated. Jane’s “Seth” personality is speaking, although nearly all the words are mine. I maintain quotation marks in order to indicate that the “lecture” is a literary contrivance and intellectual fiction (a performative enactment, basically, of self-multiplication). All quotations—using single quotation marks—are from the text by Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, discussed in the course of this “lecture.”)

The lecture began:

“Allow me first to express my gratitude to you for raising the question of my involvement here with philosophy, since it must indeed be addressed before we proceed. For even if the supposed author of this text has more or less successfully demonstrated that some of the concepts about the psyche Jane and I elaborated together require some theoretico-philosophical interpretation if what your times still call their ‘extra-metaphysical’ status is to become apparent, the basic fact of our discourse being what much of your world would consider ‘religious’ can still make the encounter seem forced or unjustified, and because of that even an obfuscation of the simple, consistently ‘spiritual’ messages given throughout our works.”

“Being, to briefly explain, that I could have never during Jane Roberts’ lifetime acquired either a political and legal status greater than that of a fictional character (crossing a national border, getting arrested or standing trial, signing a contract, and even being attributed authorship of my books—“A Seth Book,” at the top of the cover, became the solution—were all out of the question) or a medical existence apart from that of a psychotic

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<sup>694</sup> UR, xxiii

<sup>695</sup> SS, 288.



delusion or 'alter' personality, and given as well that what 'I' spoke of were invariably matters (the soul, its reincarnations, my status as one, and so on) considered legitimate only within the domain of religious institutions and their discourses, the rational evaluation of myself and my ideas by the academic and general readers of a book like the one I am the subject of can only seem a both inappropriate and thoroughly questionable endeavor."

"For on the one hand, the genre of discourse that my own utterances more or less belonged to—popular religion—cannot be suitable for the same kind of interpretative consideration as those whose epistemological assumptions, governing rules, referents, etc. allow them to be rationally assessed. Since but a few odd listeners and almost no discursive genres accord validity to most of the referents and concepts I was concerned with, it seems they can be philosophically approached only by means of a sort of subterfuge that consists of silently effacing all the instances in my texts where I assume their basic reality while simultaneously emphasizing other passages that question this by characterizing every instance of the real, for example, as at once 'probable' and 'actual,' and that can, therefore, be construed as open to philosophical interpretation. So even if a motive for working this sort of fusion were to be provided, the canny reader would nevertheless still have cause to question whether it first required pretending away both what the modernity most in the audience believe themselves to inhabit would call the *religious* status of my discourse as well then as the enormous question of what part of the real it contends with could call for the philosophical consideration and use of its statements."

"Now the apparently religious nature of my discourse, on the other hand, makes this philosophical 'dialogue,' if this it could indeed be, dubious twice-over for the very reason that I, being of but a doubtful existence in your present societies, can neither be presumed capable of the sorts of intentions other speakers in them generally are nor therefore really interpretable as an author can be. Because one never intellectually knows in what category a 'person' like me belongs, whether my 'I' even exists in the way most are thought to or is simply the mask or alias of a readable self whose desires or thoughts I might then by proxy express, the least interpretation of me gives off the scent of implausibility. Those here who have skimmed or read through some of the book about me no doubt noted the author shifting, often in the same phrase or sentence, his characterizations of me: sometimes I express what Jane cannot, sometimes I am accorded no reality, sometimes I am the pure cipher of something that comes through her and articulates responses to her questions about what I could at all be... Since the murmurs passing through the room now are probably whispered surprise that I would elide the reality that I am just a part of speech or the text itself, let me clarify that this makes not even the slightest difference: although what was called 'the author function' rarely coincides with the individual writing a text (literary, etc.), it should be remembered that the author is nonetheless always the *human* presumed to write a text. Devils, spirits, schizophrenics, and animals do not write books (and if it were believed a demigod did, nobody would consider it a text)."

"So go the objections a learned, cutting-edge audience such as yours will almost necessarily raise to what few of you would accept as my *presence* here. Since, to sum up, my words are neither interpretable as those engaged by academe and the literati normally are nor concerned (apart from what would then be the exceptions you saw previously) with what either party would consider reality, 'theory,' 'philosophy,' or 'thought' in their current senses then cannot and could not concern me."

"Now condensed into these criticisms is the crux of the problem that made it urgent for me to address you in the first place. Naming it before extracting and reconstituting it, we

will call it the problem of *the multiplicity of spirit*, hence a certain part of the title of my lecture. The phrase is meant to suggest a few things...

“*What spirit has long made of the multiple* is at bottom the source of why there would seem to be no reason for philosophical engagement with what on the surface seem my completely fantastic ideas (meaning ideas at once largely ‘fantastical,’ undoubtedly phantasmatic, and often reminiscent of the genre of fantastic literature). The philosophy and thought of recent times, that is, know virtually no ‘spiritual’ questions—no questions, that is, arising from what is today called spiritual experience or life—for the simple reason that the inheritance left them by their forebears maintained intact and subjected to few essential modifications the quite ancient Platonic oppositions between the One and the multiple as well as those between the unity of all transcendence or essence and the multiplicity of immanence and contingency. Wherever the main line of the Western philosophical tradition changes master terms, there comes an accompanying transposition of these very distinctions.<sup>696</sup> ‘Spirit’ carries at this time a polyvalence well suited for conveying the unbroken, continuous nature of the suppression in the West of the multiple beneath and now the reversal of that hierarchy: the divine ground or God of medieval thought is almost exclusively intelligible nowadays as divinity or spirit (even if the part of it properly *pneuma* was something else), as is the anthropocentered (subject-) ground of the moderns, once spirit is understood in the sense of ‘mind’ born by the equivalents from neighboring languages (*l’esprit*, *Geist*). Now since both forms of spirit were both conceived as transcending the multiplicity of contingency, one can immediately see that as the multiple was freed and given a basically essential status in some of the philosophies of your twentieth century (Nietzsche’s, deconstruction, Deleuze) the multiple so freed was this very multiplicity of spirit. Even as, to explain, what was meant by multiple changed quite significantly (some of what Deleuze understood by ‘multiplicity’ has been evident, and the sense Derrida gave the term will be seen), the term remained in opposition to the spirits—the subject, whatever remained of God—it overcame and replaced.”

“Perhaps you can see where I’m going: the philosophies of difference or multiplicity have been largely diffident to spirituality because their understandings of the real prevent them from attaching importance to meditation, the access to knowledge it is supposed to grant, and the awakenings supposed ultimately to result from them. The disconnect is not simply a result of the rejection of the tacit, naïve teleologies often accompanying the practice of such techniques (this is too simple) but of two much more profound factors. It is, on the one hand, finally more a matter of the discord between a real inherently multiple—nowhere does it completely gather up, no principle can account for it—and another supposed to be, as was the God or Godhead of the medievals, an ultimate and pervasive presence. On the other hand, whoever it is that practices meditation must finally be for this philosophy a subject insofar as he must be capable of acts of knowledge and will (this will be shown more precisely later). So the persistence of presence and subject in spirituality remain the points of contention tacitly leading to this disengagement, and the condition in both cases is the multiplicity of spirit; what I am calling the degradation of multiplicity at the hands of spirit.”

“Could there be another philosophical approach to spirituality? What would call for this? Would it be the necessity of a “spiritual” approach to the philosophical? This is, of

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<sup>696</sup> For a new reading of Heidegger’s account of this transposition—the transformation of itself by which metaphysics maintains continuity with itself—see Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: The Fantastic in Philosophy* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2011).

course, what I am working toward here, under the same title—but now in a quite different sense, where the genitive is subjective—of (another) multiplicity of spirit.”

“But before turning to this possibility, we have to examine another, almost pernicious reason no such philosophy or theory has as of yet emerged (and why one is therefore needed). The same ‘multiplicity of spirit’ again obstructs access, this time through its mere reinscription and not its incomplete subversion.”

“The philosophy of philosophers alone has not set in place the conditions preventing any meeting between it and the many (non-) knowledges and (anti-) techniques that get grouped together under the concept of ‘spirituality.’ Spirituality, too, has played quite the role here; probably even the greater one. Making this point will at first require some sweeping statements, even if they are not entirely justified. Spirituality at present remains almost entirely disjoined from contact with philosophy out of the quite simple fact that both the majority of those discourses constituting it in the West—Advaita, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism—and the disciples, teachers, and masters of these based there quite unthinkingly reproduce certain core elements of the old, antemodern metaphysics of substance when conceiving the nature of the real as well as of the self that must seemingly be transcended in order to achieve identity with it (such an identity of course sometimes also being, properly put, a nonidentity). In a word, spirituality often very simplistically declares, whether despite or because of what the traditions it belongs to and grows from say about what philosophy called substance and subject, that there is an ultimate, divine reality or real that transcends every apparently finite individual as the true nature and final end of the course of its existence; “spirituality” also says that it must be experienced as such by human and other sentient beings if they are to find relief from the suffering arising from both desire and the resultant identification they maintain with themselves as separate, falsely transcendent identities. While such a characterization of Buddhist- and Hindu- derived discourse is not precisely true of certain instances of it—Zen, most notably, scrupulously avoids treating as substantial the supposed referents of any signified, so that there is no absolute nature, transcendence, final ends, etc.—the apparent exceptions also nonetheless at bottom themselves tacitly maintain, in their practices, such readymade ontotheological assumptions or else end up being interpreted as doing so when received and reiterated through European languages and concepts, which of course easily lend themselves to such Platonic and Christian assumptions. So ‘spirituality,’ even as it presents as the sole alternative to what has become the both unbelievable and unbearable monotheisms of the West, nonetheless requires accepting, in ‘theory’ or else in ‘practice,’ this same old metaphysics.”

“Of the many problems that could or do consequently arise, those of concern to me here will be but a few: the *‘perennialization’* of a *thought* that then ought no longer be called philosophical; the subsequent *neglect of the question of who or what the self is* that is said to be, seemingly perennially, in need of being transcended; and, bound up with the latter, the *problem of conceiving the all or the absolute*. None of which even seem questions when spirituality gets going with what I will keep calling the multiplicity of spirit, refuses the relevance to itself of thinking.”

The evident irritation of practitioners and scholars of said religions at this caricature of them brought his speech to a halt. There followed justifications, specifications, elaborations: a reminder that the repeated Vedic influence on ancient Greek and Hellenic thought as well as the conceptual forms common to Indo-European languages imply that

the transcendence both ascribe to the absolute is often continuous across both cases<sup>697</sup>... a long explanation on how the neglect of issues of translation (he explained to the audience that he, mere spirit, had thought it a problem) in the Buddhism of the United States had led to the transposition into it of Christian theological themes... an argument that ontotheology may be common to all the major world religions.

"There is an old antagonism in the West," he explained, "between the practitioners of the type of intellectual thought Aristotle called contemplation and those pursuing that other sort of "contemplation" said to lead to a (sometimes unitive) experience of the presence of God or the absolute. While philosophers for the most part devoted themselves to the former, discursive endeavor, many of the pious of the monotheisms and the Hellenic religions alike often opted to forego it altogether out of an understanding that it only rarely leads to the absolute knowledge of unitive experience. Whether this special class of the pious lacked the requisite learning for theory or had acquired but then renounced it upon becoming convinced of the importance of mystical contemplation, they saw quite clearly that philosophy was to some extent superfluous to their aims. So even though the ranks of the contemplatives and mystics includes some of the very greatest of the philosophers—Plotinus, Dionysius, Eckhart, Ibn al'Arabi, Cusa—they are more often found eschewing thinking and knowledge except where it supports piety. And sometimes, of course, they reject philosophy altogether as chief among the hindrances to knowledge of the absolute."

"[W]hatever one may say about God can never in any circumstances be the truth,"<sup>698</sup> he seemed to be quoting, "if correct, because adequate, propositional knowledge is what is meant by truth. So the mystics and contemplatives say."<sup>699</sup>

"St. Thomas Aquinas was saying exactly the same thing," he signaled that this was indeed quotation, "when, after his experience of infused contemplation, he refused to go on with his theological work, declaring that everything he had written up to that time was as mere straw compared with the immediate knowledge, which had been vouchsafed to him. Two hundred years earlier, in Baghdad, the great Mohammedan theologian, al-Ghazzali, had similarly turned from the consideration of truths about God to the contemplation and direct apprehension of Truth-the-Fact, from the purely intellectual discipline of the philosophers to the moral and spiritual discipline of the Sufis."<sup>700</sup>

"In such celebrated cases as well as among countless others lost to all but the meticulous historian of theology," a gesture right before had closed the quote, "the philosopher himself lets go or abandons philosophy upon recognizing that systematic, discursive reasoning cannot bring about the other knowledge or communicate it."

"Yet there are quite specific reasons those who kept at philosophy even after encountering union are forgotten in favor of those who engaged in this special renunciation..."

He launched into an outline of the historical conditions of the progressive cleaving of mysticism from philosophy that started with an account of how the threats Nominalism posed to God separated mystical from philosophical inquiry (he seemed here to be lifting from Hans Blumenberg), linked the disappearance of Christian mysticism following its

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<sup>698</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy: An Interpretation of the Great Mystics, East and West* (New York: Harper Perennial Classics, 2004), 126. Hereafter cited as *PP*.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*

Spanish effervescence to the rise of a capitalism that favored this-worldly religion, and then showed that the increasing loss of transcendence in modernity meant that pursuit of the “absolute experience” was largely forewent by even contemplatives like the Quakers or Pietists for less intense inner illuminations (Spiritualism, he said, came at the tail end of this, as a mysticism in which the other “presence” encountered is another person). As philosophy increasingly accepted to work within this worldly horizon, it stopped being concerned with individual experiences of the absolute.

“So by the time the 20<sup>th</sup>-C. discovers en masse Buddhist and other spiritualities which, although not based in Christianity or Islam, pursue a state commensurate and possibly identical with those at the core of the mystical traditions, there are no longer philosophies that could be concerned with them. All that is left are vague and tattered recollections of Neoplatonic concepts and Christian mystical themes that arise whenever there is a need to conceive the prospect or real occurrence of what now gets called ‘enlightenment.’ Which leads us back to the question of the so-called perennial philosophy (and eventually to the problem of multiplicity).”

“*The Perennial Philosophy*, as many of you will know, is the title of a book by Aldous Huxley. It was the one I quoted from just now, something I did in order to provide a crucial instance of the multiplicity of spirit preventing the other philosophy of spirituality. The most anyone now generally knows of this brilliant writer, of course, is his novel *Animal Farm* as well as the fact that he was the author of *The Doors of Perception*, a text important to the white counterculture in my day as Jane. If we take it up, it is because it is deeply characteristic of the reasons for the spiritual rejection of thought or the above question, which we will see nonetheless takes place through a claim to philosophy.

“The ‘PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS,’ he says straight off about the name of the anthology and the genre of writing it is supposed to comprise, was a ‘phrase... coined by Leibniz’ and therefore would presumably refer, as it did for this philosopher, to some species of the many sorts of writing or thought that belong to the rubric of philosophy.<sup>701</sup> But no; although the work is ‘an anthology of the Perennial Philosophy, it contains but few extracts from the writing of professional men of letters and, though illustrating a philosophy, hardly anything from the professional philosophers.’<sup>702</sup> (Such a statement might then lead some of your contemporary philosophers to make an ironic declaration of the problem thus immediately indicated—something like ‘so there will not be much philosophy in the perennial philosophy’—but a less cutting approach is in order for a nonphilosopher like myself.) ‘The reason for this,’ he continues, ‘is very simple. The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds.’<sup>703</sup> That is, as the ‘the metaphysic that recognizes’ this real as well as both ‘the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality’ and ‘the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being,’ it can alone be the provenance of ‘those who have chosen to fulfill certain conditions’ granting access to it by ‘making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit.’<sup>704</sup> So there must in principle be an absence of philosophy from the perennial philosophy, for

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<sup>701</sup> *PP*, viii.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*

In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets or metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone... such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend... To such first-hand exponents of the Perennial Philosophy those who knew them have generally given the name of 'saint' or 'prophet,' 'sage' or 'enlightened one.' And it is mainly to these, because there is good reason for supposing that they knew what they were talking about, and not to the professional philosophers or men of letters, that I have gone for my selections.<sup>705</sup>

"While many obvious objections," Seth continued, "must be raised ('metaphysics' and 'ethics' become something else when stripped of philosophy and letters, all talk of final ends, transcendence, and immanence would also then be vapid, even modern theology rarely so vulgarly distinguishes spirit from the letter...), they will nonetheless be of little use unless the distinction drawn here between the philosopher or professional thinker and the saint or mystic is first acknowledged to be more or less valid."

"The real problem," he said after emphasizing that this difference between the mystic and philosopher has been as integral to certain modern thinkers as it was in prior ages, "is not the distinction itself, but its basic redundancy with respect to its modern socio-historical inscription: since spirituality is already dissociated in its institutions and practices not only from those of philosophy but also literature and science generally (a cleavage well in place by Huxley's time), plainly reiterating and reaffirming this separation can only serve to further impoverish the already paltry conceptual resources available to it. For what is thereby presumed is that the experience of the mystic is so simple and transparent that it never solicits from the one undergoing or seeking it questions that might require anything resembling study, research, or learning (or, therefore, formal education, universities, teachers, and books), let alone the often torturous existential uncertainty brought about and demanded by thought."

"Or if it could somehow be granted that questions can arise"—this jab was somehow kindly delivered—"they will nonetheless have already been answered by the perennial 'philosophy' (which will also have by then started bespeaking itself)."

"Now since few among those being addressed here believe such a prospect tolerable (few here believe it tolerable even though most here tolerate quite well not facing the hot pincers of the question, especially if they believe or practice some spirituality that must almost of necessity be divorced from thought), there is no need to waste words criticizing it just for being anti-intellectual. Because the problem, again, is not the distinction between mystical and philosophical knowledge but in how self-evident it has become in the domain of spirituality, the real reason to question the widespread presumption there of the perennial and uniform character of the former sort of knowledge is how it leads right back to the dual problem of substance and subject that was identified before as arising from the multiplicity of spirit."

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<sup>705</sup> *PP*, ix.

“Of course ‘the perennial philosophy’ will seem to many to sin chiefly through misunderstanding the complex specificity of non-Christian traditions and then conflating them. The real political failure here, however, is not the cultural imperialism of the gesture but its ignorant sanction of what ought to be dubbed the imperialism of the divine: the diverse cultural ‘rationales’ for the psychic and social dominance of human beings by what amounts to some supposedly absolute ontological ground. After all, the position Huxley expresses for spirituality about the sages—that they are all ultimately of one mind about the one (no-) mind being the ultimate—is indeed often pronounced by the sages, with but scarce qualification about what good (if any) living a ‘human’ and therefore nonultimate life would then be. (Too often it ends up violently treated as in need of being escaped.)”

Seeing the confusion and offense this one caused, he pretended it was digression.

“All I mean is that because spirituality, as we just saw, often in fact does insistently declare knowledge of whatever divine ground it espouses the end-all be-all of a life and is therefore content to neglect philosophy for the one supposed eternal, what is most questionable in perennialization is not the cultural homogenization at work in it but its reduction of the sheer diversity of ‘human’ possibilities to mere preludes to their being returned to themselves from the supposed illusion of their separateness. There would even to some extent be no point in paying them attention. The multiple once more gets crushed by spirit.”

“The two hammers doing the flattening are spirituality’s versions of the two stems of the multiplicity of spirit: the conceptions of the absolute and the self it acquires through perennialization. What Huxley says about them is almost interchangeable with what most the current spiritual authorities do.”

“The ground of all,” he resumed the gloss, “gets conceived as a unity of being from which distinct beings emerge and finally return, and that, because it is then infinite, exceeds every linguistic signification so that it can only be indicated as ‘That.’ For after some preliminary quotations about the nature of this God he has claimed the various spiritual traditions all declare the individual to be essentially like or identical with, Huxley asks, ‘What is [this] That to which the thou can discover itself to be akin?’ before responding that

“To this the Perennial Philosophy has at all time and in all places given fundamentally the same answer. The divine Ground of all existence is a spiritual Absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought but... susceptible of being directly experienced and realized by the human being. This Absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology.”<sup>706</sup>

“Given his choice to heed (certain) mystics over all but the most ‘mystical’ philosophers, this characterization could seem viable. Wherever, Huxley says, the religious traditions have foresworn the conceptions of this absolute as the ‘personal,’ ‘all-powerful ruler of the world’ or as this same ‘potentate... God’ now improved into a ‘loving father’ common to most of them (the former is ‘ritualistic legalism’ that ‘improves conduct’ but cannot ‘modify consciousness’ as the latter does, albeit insufficiently) they have basically arrived at this understanding.<sup>707</sup> the Tao, Sufism’s al Haqq, the medieval Godhead, and Brahman are at bottom the same real, with Buddhism close by.”

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<sup>706</sup> *PP*, 21.

<sup>707</sup> *PP*, 23.

“The greatest consonance is between certain Vedic texts and the mysticism of Eckhart and John of the Cross,” Seth explained by reading the quotations Huxley used to establish the ultimate as a unity beyond predication that transcends every individual.

“Bringing out these ostensible similarities virtually obligates Huxley (and therefore spirituality generally) to adopt old fragments of the Christian mysticisms,” Seth now said. “Since the ground transcends all beings while also being ‘immanent’ as their true nature, a slight, decontextualized piece of the emanationism of the mystics is required: ‘There is a hierarchy of the real,’ he declares, for although ‘the manifold world of experience is real with a relative reality... this relative reality has its being within and because of the absolute Reality.’<sup>708</sup> Yet given the hindrances conceptual thought would pose to understanding this, Huxley foregoes examining the fate of the grades of being or hypostases so that he can offer the supposedly ecumenical explanation of emanation: the Pauline triad of body, soul, spirit.

“Whence the theodicy and soteriology ascribed the perennial philosophy. ‘As all [its] exponents,’ we are told, ‘have constantly insisted, man’s obsessive consciousness of, and insistence on being, a separate self is the final and most formidable obstacle to the unitive knowledge of God’ and thus ‘the original sin.’<sup>709</sup> Undoing this self and its consciousness, then, requires that the ‘life of craving and self-interest, of egocentric thinking, feeling, wishing, and acting’ be ‘lost,’<sup>710</sup> or, as Huxley violently puts it, ‘the annihilation of the self-regarding ego,’ that ‘barrier separating the thou from the That.’<sup>711</sup>

“There are so many problems here,” he said slowly and with great sadness. “You scholars would be right to pick away at the inaccuracies (few traditions put it so simply) and ethical problems such simple statements entail, although Huxley, it should be said, would respond to the second charge by pointing out that mortification alone is not enough for achieving transcendence. Most unfortunate, though, is simply the assumption that separation, as well as the differentiation and individuation that have to precede and follow it, are so tantamount to evil as to make salvation a simple matter of their undoing. So many of the difficulties brought about by the spiritual practices aiming at just that—the belief that a life must be spiritually justified, indifference toward politics and history, the denigration of the body—would never have arisen had this belief not become the soteriological bottom line.”

“These issues will be for later,” his tone sharpened again, “since the other part of spirituality’s version of the multiplicity of spirit remains before us. In fact, these issues can be best discussed in light of what this second part will allow us to say about the self.”

“Now it would seem that Huxley could have very little more to say about this self believing itself separate and distinct from the ground except that it is sin. Although the traditions spirituality works and draws from have much to say on this point (the Tibetan bardos, etc.), Huxley has so vastly reduced what in certain human beings is self that subsequent mention of it mostly concerns how its traits interfere with spiritual progress and mask their role in narcissistic forms of mortification. But something else gets said as well.”

“Just before his initial discussion of the doctrine of the identity of ground and self, Huxley states that it pertains not to ‘the personal ego’ but ‘that eternal Self in the depth of the particular’ and therefore ‘belongs to *autology* rather than psychology.’<sup>712</sup> After what we

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<sup>708</sup> *PP*, 36.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>710</sup> *PP*, 96.

<sup>711</sup> *PP*, 35.

<sup>712</sup> *PP*, 1.



have seen, it comes as no surprise that ‘the perennial philosophy’ gets so christened. Nor will it that he regards existing psychologies (la Rochefoucauld’s) as good mostly for exposing the unconscious motives of the psyche that prevent it from identifying with itself as spirit or the One. What nonetheless stands out is how Huxley decides to define this psyche when the time for that arrives.”

“This ego or personal self, he tells us,” Seth turned to the chapter of the book concerning it, “is composed ‘of identifications with multitudinous ‘possible objects’ that range from ‘pleasures,’ emotions, and ‘talents’ to achievements and social institutions (‘family,’ ‘professions,’ ‘political parties,’ ‘churches’).”<sup>713</sup> Given the diversity of such points of identification as well as the fact ‘we are free... to identify ourselves with more than one of these things simultaneously’ (but this is ‘temptation’), a ‘complex personality’ is basically a ‘quite astonishingly improbable combination of traits,’ a ‘diversity of moods, cravings, and opinions’ so vast that this ‘multiplicity’ deserves the very special name of ‘Legion.’”<sup>714</sup>

“We’ll pause here in order to see what Huxley intends with this choice of words. ‘The biographies of saints,’ he says, ‘testify unequivocally that spiritual training leads to a transcendence of personality.’

Those who win through to the unitive knowledge of God set out upon their course from the most diverse starting points. One is man, another a woman; one a born active, another a born contemplative. No two of them inherit the same temperament and physical constitution, and their lives are passed in material, moral, and intellectual environments that are profoundly dissimilar. Nevertheless, insofar as they are saints... they are all astonishingly alike. Their actions are uniformly selfless and they are constantly *recollected* [...]

‘Of even plain average people,’ on the other hand—those still caught in identifications of a personal nature instead of one ‘beyond selfness’ —‘it may be said that their name is Legion.’”<sup>715</sup>

“The reference, since it is in the course of being forgotten, is to the incident in the Gospel of Mark where a young, demon-possessed man is brought to Jesus for healing. Since the man himself cannot speak, the evil spirits possessing him are addressed with the question, ‘What is thy name?’ so that, the authorities say, he can regain power over them. After three times, they respond ‘Legion,’ a name that thus became synonymous with demonic possession in Christian societies (along with what for monotheism is paganism, since this name identified them with the Imperial rule over the Jews).”

“So the fact that Huxley designates all the identifications of the personality with this name indicates that he understands them to be akin to intrusions into the psyche by gangs of demons that then either completely take over or at least pull it away from the end of transcendence so that it remains ‘double-minded’ and ‘half-hearted,’ but not ‘single,’ like that of a saint.”

“Unless the individual goes that far, Huxley finishes, he will be ‘*polypsychic*,’ mired in a ‘*polytheistic*’ universe of the false gods that compete for his identification.”

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<sup>713</sup> PP, 40.

<sup>714</sup> PP, 40, 44.

<sup>715</sup> PP, 44-45.

The talk came to a sudden halt that was maintained for an uncomfortably long time. Seth then drew all eyes to his own and flashed a look that burned so intense that it could have suggested rage and violence, had there not been too much peace and humor in it for that.

“Should I be considered just one of these...?; a mere identification, which, like any other, ought to be dispensed with through enlightenment...? Or even a metaphoric or real demon (they’re the same thing in *The Perennial Philosophy*) that kept Jane from realizing her true nature or face...?”

“Will that be all that all of you are?”

“Such questions will mean little to those who have not only never adopted some tenets of the contemplative spiritual practices or practiced one of them rigorously but who basically have little feel for or sense of them, their doctrines and concerns seeming as strange as incomprehensible languages. (The questions, as remains to be seen, nonetheless pertain to you.) But the portion of the audience involved in spirituality, which will by now be far larger than it would seem, will perfectly get the sense or even sharp point of what I am asking. A few will recoil at the apparently foolish sacrilege of the thing, the insinuation that some psychic, mediumistic ‘phenomenon’ like me could be an essential dimension of enlightenment (spiritual masters mostly warn against this). Many others, being united against what they agree to be legion, will look askance at the suggestion that being ordinarily ‘polypsychic,’ feeling oneself separate and multifariously unique, is not indeed the basic ailment afflicting human beings (they will add that most spiritualities nonetheless seek not the annihilation of such separation but its revelation as illusion). Yet others will greet my line of thought with relief from having witnessed firsthand the casualties of spirit—the ego foolishly subordinate to the guru, traumatized people further neglecting themselves in the name of sacrifice—while never being sure that the practices and doctrines themselves were not somehow in principle at fault. But most of these will still wonder how refusing to capitulate to the denigration of persons through multiplying them could nonetheless redress the situation: people having multiple personalities in the clinical sense are for the most part those with weak, probably because violated, egos.”

“In brief, the real objection will be that there can be a maintenance of the self against its “spiritual” denigration, but that this need not involve multiplying it.”

“Yet this last objection will arise among even those listeners barely cognizant of the stakes of these criticisms of spirituality; they too will hear me as but a dangerous or superficial advocate for madness. Or so it will seem. The real grounds for their objection, however, will once again be more philosophical, lying on the other side of the multiplicity of spirit: whatever name it might be given, we will hear again, there can be no self where the dispersion that is the character of the real is really at work. And so...”

“So we come full circle, even if by divergent routes, with neither spirituality nor philosophy entertaining the peculiar multiplicity I could *in (some other) actuality* be: whether because some substance presumed spirit is equated with the essence of an individual whose variegated, dispersed self it could not then be or from the plural character of the latter being raised to that role after being made so extreme that this same individual could never find itself there, the polypsychic meets a bad fate. That is, it will either *be bad* or else *barely at all*, such that it will, in both cases, lack the character of the real.”

“Now...” he started, but then stopped, effecting that he was gathering himself while gauging how much he had been understood. It was a long pause, and then...

“Now our point of departure,” he was almost laughing, “was the quite understandable question of what, of all people, I would be doing—whatever could I be

doing...?—playing, especially as an outsider, with philosophy. Some time was of course needed to get us back to the matter, but it was certainly not forgotten. Could my motive for thinking now be evident?”

“The ordinarily discrete paths of philosophy and spirituality again converge not just where the possibility of the multiplicity of self is concerned. Quite curiously, they share in common one more trait: both postulate, through conceiving all self as phenomenal, an opposition between (empirical) actuality and another order of the real ascribed more power and origin-ality, if not reality, than it. In short, philosophy has maintained, despite its successes at doing just the opposite, a residual theological dimension whereby what seem actual beings are deprived of power. This would lead, were the ethics derived from and bound up with this position literally followed, to practices not unlike those of spirituality to the extent that they would involve the self letting itself go so that the creativity (or inventiveness) of the real could give itself full force (hence the ethics of power in Deleuze and that of the gift in Derrida). In short, what spirituality philosophy does have would require of the individual as much yielding and deactualization before the real as does spirituality itself.”

“Now there is far more to steer clear of here than the potential this resurgent *theos* has of treating the individual with the same violence as spirituality can and does; the troubles that arise when escaping or sacrificing the self for a supramundane, nonanthropological force (a fair characterization of your ‘difference’ as much as of God) is made the motor of ethical life are known: the would-be martyr, for instance, finds the give-and-take of reciprocity difficult from regarding it as selfish and compromised; those bent on erasing themselves often are out of despair at their perhaps atypically rapacious egos, and those who partially succeed at this are often then so unaccustomed to mundane life that their narcissism never gets tamed by some of the finer arts of life; even the simple art of having a little faith or trust in oneself often becomes difficult when such attitudes are to be reserved for something outside all self (even when this other is philosophically conceived)... Such problems are of course not inevitable consequences of recent philosophy, but little in it prevents or even addresses them for the very reason that it has remained unconcerned with reconceptualizing the actual individual after locating the power of the real outside it. Once the individual self is put down, so to speak, the old problem of determining how it can, *as self* or *itself*, relate to the real ethically gets forgotten.”

“So philosophy arrives, as theory, very close to where spirituality does concerning self, ethics, and the real,” he quickly summed up. “Both stipulate loss of self (so as to gain the real) as being necessary for ethical life while neglecting to account for how some self can still nonetheless prove indispensable to this, along with the question that must follow: just what, again, should be made of this self to be lost?”

“Such,” he concluded, “is the other commonality between contemporary philosophy and spirituality.”

“But two crucial discrepancies, however, prevent their occupying the same spot here. Although the plural, divergent character the former attributes the real is deprived the self, the rules of the philosophico-theoretical (writing) game do not foreclose in advance conceiving the matter in the opposite fashion. What can be said of some of your philosophers and writers unfortunately cannot be of most practitioners of spirituality: they are capable of redistributing the real, i.e. refusing to take basic conceptual distinctions as self-evident. Moreover, philosophy itself has for a long time been right on the verge of accounting for this self. Buried beneath the assumptions it saddles itself with, is its potential to express how becoming ‘polypsychic’ might lead out of the impasses that come from

venerating or putting faith in a real still well beyond the self; a real, to get ahead of myself again, whose multiplicity could be brought into the self so that the latter will acquire its character and also through that some means of dealing with the sheer diversity outside it. (This will be explained later.)”

“Another way of putting it would be to say that philosophy presently has so few means of denying my reality at its disposal (here I am) that I have been able to slip quietly into it and begin redirecting its phrases toward expressing how the subject and multiplicity can be wrapped together into another sort of self. While the problem of my illegibility does not dissipate, the possibility of this self is present in it.

“So just what business do I have with philosophy? Since half-dispensing with the transcendence of the divine permitted philosophy to come quite close to understanding the plurality and multiplicity of the real, it proves a far better medium than most spirituality for discursively transmitting the lesson about the self that still needs to be learned, which comes down to this. Although the abandonment or sacrifice of the concept and reality of the subject that as yet literally underpins so much (planetarized) Western thought and culture will be necessary if there is to remain any hope of shifting human beings into the ethical mode that would permit for the other, hitherto unseen world of which so many of you still dream, the still basically spiritual sacrifice of the subject must nonetheless yield (to) the emergence of another self having the character of the real that thought still treats as quasi-transcendent. In other words, you must thoroughly *transform* what you consider to be self through *establishing a consciousness wherein each one both knows itself as many and collapsing thereby the distinction thought still draws between the self and the real (difference or virtual) with which God was replaced*. The subject must finally die, yes, but not so that the real can simply take over an empty shell, but so *the self can find itself in a plurality still conceived as almost transcendent but which, if the distinction between self and the real is truly abandoned, will instead become identical with the actuality thought immanent and subordinate to it such that God too will finally die in the process*. Philosophy, because it is so close to the dilemma, can permit me to say this.”

“The *depersonalization and desubjectivation* now vital for the world must open to *multipersonification and polysubjectivation, a metamorphosis of self* that will of necessity also be a further *de-theologization and de-transcendentalization* of the core of your philosophy: a *counteractualization of the self and its reality* at the same time effectuating a *devirtualization of the real* and therefore a *merging of actualities with the other, virtual possibilities they could be, a fusion bringing about another form of reality of the real. Desire, will, and knowledge can be abandoned for modes of themselves in which others do these things with and for us.*”

“All this, of course, remains to be explained. But once it has, it will become quite evident that spirituality itself could not elaborate these thoughts that nonetheless concern it. Philosophy, though farther from ‘spirit’ than spirituality, comes closer to expressing the apotheosis from accepting that it amounts to theicide as much as sacrifice of self. With less multiplicity of spirit holding it back, philosophy is capable of conceiving *the polytheization of self/ detheologization of the spirit*.”

“Which should not be taken as implying that philosophy alone could bring about or provide an understanding of such changes. On the contrary, philosophical language will from the outset find it difficult to approach or understand an experience that can only be entered into language with great difficulty: the “double consciousness” of the mysticism” of what I have discussed ”

“But what nonetheless renders philosophy susceptible to this experience is just the thing that attracts me to it, despite and past our dissimilarities: philosophy, perhaps more than most other games played in your Western languages, can be drawn into seeing what I

have described and then pushed to conceive both the status of its reality and the bearing of this on the status of reality. For what befell Jane, increasingly if not from the start, were not primarily 'experiences' of a nature incommunicable from occurring far past anything language could say of them, but images: *she had visions*. She saw what we were speaking of."

*"And images, even those thought hallucinatory, can always be bound to language, if at the cost of its being frayed and twisted around to accommodate them."*

#### THE WRITER AND HIS INTELLECTUAL COUNTERPARTS (ON METHOD)

Were a reserved, more traditionally academic scholar to have become caught up in fascination with Jane and my collaborations and descried in them questions proximate or even almost identical to those so far raised here in a more or less philosophical fashion... were a historian of religion or a proper cultural anthropologist, for instance, were to have come across our kaleidoscope books and then accounted in the cautious (and thus sometimes more cunning) and erudite fashion of the best of their trade for the novelty of the series of conceptual shapes and figures that bedazzled him as he twisted, shook, and upended them ... were he to have been chasing tenure (with intellectual sobriety accordingly justified as what keeps him on track) or cheerfully past it and contributing an article concerning us to a collection or a journal, the pictures granted during stolen moments spent peering into our weird wonderworks would probably have led him to formulate a thesis characterizing their (mundane) author as "a strange mélange of spirit medium, feminine mystic, late modern 'Gnostic,' quasi-speculative thinker, and writer with Emersonian tendencies" (a quintet arrived at because of the confluence in this one woman of channeling, "somatic phenomena typical of medieval mystics," "grand but uneven theological speculation articulated at the midpoint between learned and vernacular discourse," "the acknowledged mark Emerson, Whitman, and Cummings made on this former science fiction writer," and "the occult Gnosticism of certain contemporary American religions (such as currents of the New Age and Scientology) and, arguably, some American literature" "whose remarkably imaginative writings attempt to reconceive the self in light of her trance experiences."

Were another possible version of this same scholar to experience the astonishment of discovering our work lying (it would seem) broken and neglected somewhere and then patiently reconstruct its pieces back into the whole he believed no one had perhaps yet seen... since he would be more speculative and comprehensively thoughtful (so he believed) than his counterpart, it would appear to him to be a magic lantern capable of projecting images as clearly outlined as they were phantasmatic and therefore amenable to the precise, long form interpretation he practiced upon ideas in the belief that a gentler but still philosophical reason alone yields worthwhile thoughts... were the version of this scholar to have written a seminar paper on Jane Roberts (a few years before being pushed by well-meaning mentors to write commentaries on great philosophers) or else a carefully crafted chapter on her for a philosophical work on poetic and vernacular American religious thought "after Christianity," he would have both immediately zeroed in on those of the texts' threads whose lexicon was borrowed from "physics, biology, as well as the poetics of media technology" and elaborated into a speculative understanding of how "the temporal present of every psychic identity always conceals a multiplicity of other, virtual possibilities nonetheless accessible through the trance or the mystical experience," which this writer would have treated in such Deleuzian terms so as to slowly tease out a hypothesis wagering

that Christian mysticism had morphed into a sort of only ambiguously religious “ethic or technique of immanence” during the centuries of European modernity.

Were still another version of this same intellectual to have crossed paths with one of our books while improvising the meandering itinerary he felt necessary if the libraries he had lived in as much as had his doubles were ever to be escaped for the peopled world... were this instance or episode of himself—whose imagination had not atrophied (while still caring for philosophy) and who had pursued spiritual practices out of necessity (but never from a belief in their own stories)—to have found my books, he would have seen them as a crystalline sphere so gigantic that a scaffolding had been erected around its diameter so that all drawn to it could peer from there at the pictures that would spontaneously form in its core and convey to them other selves just past the horizon of their own... were he to write, as now he is, about the strange self he had seen there, he would quickly realize that neither the anthropology nor the philosophy of his doubles that he too carried inside him (the first as a kind of fringe, the second as an alter ego...) would be of much use unless they could be subtly cajoled into expressing for him this image of an actual person opened up so that other possible persons become actual within it, or, in other words (provided to him by philosophy...), the image of “a self-consciousness of being another” effected through “a counteractualization of self/devirtualization of the real.” Were he to conceive with words, he realizes, the glimmering image of this self so as to then bring out the spirituality and ethics bound up with it, it would take participating in the process from which it arises (here the old anthropology would come with him...) by displacing his own self and replacing it with mine. So that my own words could do the talking needed to coax the old word(s) on the real into leaving the old library in order to reside in Jane’s and mine—“*the library of the superreal*”—where these other possibilities can come about.

So starting now, he altogether stops obstructing the way so that I can finally, boldly speak and work for and through him the psycho-philosophic mutation he has been chasing for so many pages (along with the more sober work his counterparts would and do want), my basic assertions (which his scholarly counterparts declare theses) being that *what allowed Jane finally to experience and make sense of “multipersonhood” was not in the end channeling me but her many visions of herself as another self*, a thought I am offering so that it can be understood that this so far vague idea of a *self whose multiplication works a synthesis of actualities and other possible or virtual versions of them became hallucinatorily ‘concrete’ or ‘real’ enough as images to be linked into your recent philosophies* such that they can be reinterpreted, *beginning with Deleuze’s* (the one closest to me), *and thereby intellectually express the peculiar ethics or spirituality badly needed to counter the disarray of your world.*

Before throwing you again into the deep end of this flood of issues, I must introduce the text that will furnish the material for their discussion. *The Unknown Reality: A Seth Book in Two Volumes* is perhaps the most difficult of the books I wrote through Jane for the simple reason that it is far less a book in the modern sense (a unity like a novel, a scholarly work, a textbook) than a compendium of lessons on the character of what has been here called the real that is also coupled to series of exercises aimed at pedagogically inducing an experience of it in the reader. Since the lessons were to be understood primarily through their enactment, both chapter titles and an evident order to these discussions were foregone so as to encourage the reader not to approach them through a familiar kind of reading. (Were the anthropologist speaking, he would be correct to point out that the book thus belongs to a genre of instructional religious texts of which Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises* is paradigmatic and whose contents are indissociable from their particular pedagogical ends... except that my text was experimental, the ends of the practice exercises not being entirely given, known, or

predetermined in advance by whatever divinity was supposed to have inspired them.<sup>716</sup>) 'The resultant disorientation for every reader, especially an intellectual one, is palpable; unless the instructions are, as is happening now, to be followed, the exercises leading the reading...

Only the reader who so experiences the concepts the book attempts to transmit will understand that this work but not the others allows the full strength of my ideas to manifest: when her other possibilities—her “probable selves” or “counterparts”—are actually experienced through her own self becoming inactual, then the durability of the weave of my thoughts can become apparent. The fact they tie together the above issues will otherwise not be apparent, the camouflage of innocuousness about them never discerned. Declarations such as “There is an ‘unknown’ reality... I am a part of it, and so are you” or “because of my position, however, I am obviously more a part of it than most” will again seem far off the path.

This will become evident through a reading of the preface to *The ‘Unknown’ Reality*. When we come below to the exercises that are often at its center, it will become evident that practicing them is what allows the text’s thinking to emerge.

“THE POSSIBILITY OF A CHANGE IN PATTERN, AN ALTERATION... OF CONCEPTS ABOUT THE SELF...”

The reading will begin with a full quotation:

#### PREFACE BY SETH

*(The circumstances surrounding Jane’s delivery of Seth’s Preface, while she was in trance, are given in the 685<sup>th</sup> session for February 25, 1974, in Section 1. After a break midway through the session, Seth began the material below at 10:57 PM. He always indicates each word, phrase, or sentence to be underlined. This time he called out each paragraph as he went along, and some of the other punctuation; to show Seth’s own sense of organization on such occasions, I’ve left a few of his instructions in place in the first three paragraphs.)*

Now: Preface: There is an “unknown” reality, in quotes as given. I am part of it, and so are you.

New paragraph. *(Long pause.)* Some time ago I suddenly appeared within your space and time. Since then I have spoken to many people. Period. This is my third book. There would be nothing strange to anyone in any of this if I had been born into your world in a body of my own, in usual terms. Instead I began to express myself through Jane Roberts. In all this there has been a purpose, and part of that purpose lies in this present book.<sup>717</sup>

Such an apparently lackluster passage would be likely to cause the reader to glaze over in indifference (or else, were the philosopher in charge, to ignore what follows from taking the basically customary step of deciding the triply mediated structure of utterance evident here — Jane iterated by “Seth” reiterated through being transcribed and parenthetically commented on by her husband Rob, whose discourse is again reiterated by the interpreter

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<sup>717</sup> UR, xxix.

— as the key to interpretation), so that the specificity of the explanation then given about these aims would lose its significance (and the course of thought that follows cut off).

“The woman through whom I speak,” as is next said, “found herself in an unusual situation, for no theories—metaphysical, psychological, or otherwise—could adequately explain her experience. She was led to develop her own, therefore, and this book is an extension of certain ideas already mentioned in *Adventures in Consciousness*,” another go at elaborating that theory.<sup>718</sup> But this time the aim is slightly different: since “the unknown reality... is unknown enough to the usual reaches of the most flexible consciousness,” ordinarily “it can only be approached by a personality as couched in it as I am” and perhaps only difficultly through rational discourse or by a being like Jane. “Once *expressed*, however, it can be comprehended. One of my purposes then has been to make this unknown reality *consciously known*.”<sup>719</sup>

“Man thought once,” I set at this aim immediately, “that there was but one world. Now he knows differently, but he stills clings to the idea of one god, one self, and one body through which to express it. *There is one God, but [within] that God are many. There is one self, but within that self are many. There is one body, in one time, but the self has other bodies at other times. All ‘times’ exist at once.*”<sup>720</sup>

“Historically speaking,” I now account for the current absence of the experience of divergently unified plurality and how this other consciousness can be won, “mankind chose a certain line of development. In it his consciousness specialized, focusing upon sharp particulars of experience. *But inherent always, psychologically and biologically, there has been the possibility of a change in that pattern, an alteration that would effectively lift [it] into another kind of weather.* Such a development would, however, necessitate first of all a *broadening of concepts about the self, and greater understanding of [...] potential.*”<sup>721</sup>

“While you have highly limited concepts about the nature of the self,” I specify why these are what must be transformed, “you cannot begin to conceive of a *multidimensional godhood*, or a [...] reality in which all consciousness is unique, inviolate—and given to the *formation* of infinite *gestalts* of organization and meaning. Your concepts of personhood are now limiting you personally and *en masse*, and yet your religions, metaphysics, histories, and even your sciences are hinged upon these [your] ideas of who and what you are. Your psychologies do not explain your own reality to you, [nor] can they contain your experience. Your religions do not explain your greater reality, and your sciences leave you [just] as ignorant about the nature of the universe.”<sup>722</sup>

“These institutions and disciplines are composed of individuals [each] restrained by [such] limiting ideas about their own private reality,” my analysis now shifts back to the book’s aims, “and so it is with private reality that we will begin and always return, period. The ideas in this book are meant to expand the private reality of each reader. They may appear esoteric or complicated, yet they are not beyond the reach of any person who is determined to understand the nature of the unknown elements of the self.”<sup>723</sup>

“In my other books I used many accepted ideas as a springboard to lead readers into other levels of understanding. Here I wish to make it clear that this book will initiate a

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<sup>718</sup> UR, xxix.

<sup>719</sup> UR, xxx.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

<sup>722</sup> UR, xxxi.

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.



journey in which in which it may seem that the familiar is left far behind. Yet when I am finished, I hope you will find that the known reality is even more precious, more ‘real,’ because you will find it illuminated both within and without by the rich fabric of an ‘unknown’ reality now seen emerging from the most intimate portions of daily life.”<sup>724</sup>

(“You may experience some irritability with some of the concepts in it,” I am saying later, “simply because you have schooled yourself so well to ignore them. You should also experience an acceleration of consciousness, however, and, as you read it, a growing sense of familiarity. The framework of this book will lead you, if you allow it, into other strata of your own greater knowledge.”<sup>725</sup>)

“The self is multidimensional when it is physically alive,” further elaboration. “It is a triumph of spiritual and psychological identity, ever choosing from a *myriad* of probable realities its *own clear, unassailable focus*,” which once again means that “in life *you poise delicately... between realities*” that are ever unstable from always intruding into, replacing, and morphing each other.<sup>726</sup>

“*The ‘unknown’ reality*” — this “bed of probable realities,” in multiplicity—“*you are its known equivalent*,” I condense the force of the paradox into an aphorism whose meaning is expanded through yet another of my repetitions of the Delphic imperative: “*Then know yourself*.”<sup>727</sup>

“*End of Preface*,” and with it all lingering concern the themes the writer now lending me brain, voice, and pen made out in the sonic haze of the words I gave back in return were just projections. Much from our point of departure is already here: the book’s re-elaboration of my and Jane’s most recent *theories* is aimed at *changing concepts of the self so as to transform consciousness into something else experiencing its identity as being ever between its myriad, potential variations and thus in essence like the real or God; it aims at accomplishing this concretely*, in those very individuals beset by limited notions of personhood and self that thereby contribute to the social maintenance (in “institutions” and “disciplines”) of these ideas; and it is further implied that *the metamorphosis of self* has in some way *both an ethical character and stake*, since it is both demanded of the reader with the ancient maxim *to know the self through turning toward it* and then characterized as *necessary if human beings are really at this point to fulfill themselves*. The only of our “theses” altogether absent from this preface is the one concerning *the concreteness of the vision of this self*. But this will soon come over you...

So with *The Unknown Reality* introduced and these thoughts concerning self, consciousness, potential, and ethics confirmed to be within it, we can plunge back into them. What may now be apparent is why the further theoretical elaboration of them the writer argued is needed was something I agreed (after accessing his head) had to start with Deleuze. The way this philosopher, I can see, conceived the real indeed had us brushing up against each other on our respective ways. (This goes well beyond Deleuze’s allowing for the kind of quasi-mystical veneration of nature or substance that Spinoza similarly enabled in German and English Romanticism.) Recapping, this was in about five ways...

(1.) *Our mutual characterization of the real or “Being” as essentially plural or multiple*. The notion of univocity through which the philosopher inside this writer tells me this multiplicity was

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<sup>724</sup> UR, xxxi.

<sup>725</sup> UR, 78.

<sup>726</sup> UR, xxxiii.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

formalized is of course far more precise than any of my own concepts and thus quite distant from them in most precise elaboration (obviously no one is confused about this). But much of what was entailed by the idea is, as was shown, quite proximate to my own more primitive ideas about the shifting, plural natures of both the individual and the real. Eliminating from the real primary senses or categories enabled Deleuze to conceive the individual entity not as a particular instance of a universal genre but rather as “nomadic” or forever unstable: because neither its form nor matter could ever be guaranteed through the accord between the categories defining it and some referent, the entity must always have counted among its parts those ordinarily attributed to others and can never be prevented from entering into other such conjunctions. The real, conceived as constituted by only such individuals such that no primary substance could underlie them, is at bottom an unending plurality of overlapping individuals (individuals and interindividuals containing intraindividuals and belonging to superindividuals). The face the real ordinarily shows us—the “reality” of formed, definite beings—therefore conceals the essence of things by naturalizing the nets of genre it casts over them. So the ultimate looks in both our cases to be multiplicities without any center.

(2.) *Our conceiving time as the trade between an order of simultaneous, virtual events and the actual circumstances of the ever-fleeting present.* Submitting time to univocity allowed Deleuze to perceive its real nature, a-theologically: once none of its parts are treated as the sense to which the others would be analogous, then time indeed “comes off its hinges” from being inconceivable as a linear sequence of presents or procession from an (unrememberable or eternal) past. Although time’s passage continues to be in evidence, rigorously distinguishing between or segregating its dimensions then proves so untenable that they are revealed to be both *simultaneous* and *multidirectional*: the present can be seen coexisting with the past (the passing of the present entails that it occurs at the same time as its past...), the whole of the past can be seen coexisting with itself (the simultaneity of present and past entails the past not being differentiable into moments), the future happening as the past does (as what passes in relation to the latter), and all this also entailing (at least logically) the past existing before the present (the latter could not otherwise pass...). Which in turns entails events being fundamentally mutable and diverging along different lines: the past is an unstable as the future (if the past, in brief, is not composed discrete former presents but somehow exists all at once, unique pasts cannot correspond to each thing); since the present is only compatible with certain pasts and futures, the apparent course or sequence of time can be unstable. Since [this order of time] is largely incompatible with an ordinary experience of “the states of affairs” comprising time, Deleuze’s distinguishes, as Jane did, between [a virtual order of time] and the actual present.

(3.) *Our assigning greater potential and power to what is virtual/nonpresent.*

(4.) *The ethics or spirituality of empowerment through counteractualization/potentialization we both in our own ways derive from this.*

So no matter how strained this comparison might have at first seemed, our affinities are extensive enough to justify interpreting Jane and me as having elaborated a basically Deleuzian “mysticism” (whose study could even provide a means for understanding the significance and possibility of mysticism proper in the West after its exiting in the last centuries religious contexts for others); you have seen how this would be done.

But there have also been hints that something else is called for.

“When I speak of probable selves,” then, in the initial chapters of *The Unknown Reality*, discussing there how the “incipient selves around the personality sometimes spring apart from the time-space structure... and become to you unreal,” it would seem almost natural to construe this statement as confirmation of the play of the actualization and virtualization of all self ever wrought by time, just as it would be to read my explaining there that “there were three offshoots” of this sort from Jane—“a nun, expressing [her] mysticism in a highly disciplined content,” “the writer who veiled mysticism under art,” “and one, the Jane you know, who underwent mystical experience directly, teaches others to do the same, and forms through writing a wedding of the two aspects”—to read the narrative of the intersections and divergences of these as the verbal record of Jane’s having been able to see into the ontological structure of time.<sup>728</sup> Much else would fall into line here.

“The deeper explanations” of time found in the very next chapter, “however, demand a further expansion of ideas, [the] certain reorientation” indicated for some time here as necessary to understand them even as it has been clear that this would require reinterpreting everything laid down in the last chapter (by, again, our philosopher...).<sup>729</sup> “What I am about to explain is difficult,”<sup>730</sup> that is, because it treats as conceivable a quite improbable, seemingly impossible coincidence or identity of the two domains of the real—the potential and the actual—that it at first, along with philosophy, accordingly seems to keep separate. The large part, again, of what I say here about the virtual/potential, the actual, and their non-coincidence and differentiation...

THE VIRTUAL/POTENTIAL: “All probable worlds... all probable variations on the most minute aspect in any reality *exist now*” (in a time whose sense would have to be specified), even “though ‘you’ assign as real—present here and now—only some” and thus “you are not aware of the others,” that is, “the infinite number of events that could have happened to you [and in fact] do happen” at this virtual, more real level of potential. The consequence of the reality of such potential being that “you are a probable self,” “the body you have is a probable body,” and “while you latch upon one personal biological history” and “one mass earth history,” “others go on about you” in “parallel.” (Even your brain is but a “probable brain [that] can translate only so much of this [potential] at a time.”) “Underneath,” then, “the recognized order of events” or present situations is the greater, virtual side of time, “a vast field [...] of probable events” and “other lines of development” that are all simultaneous to each other.<sup>731</sup>

THE ACTUAL: “Each probability,” however, “is probable only in relation to and from the standpoint of other probabilities” since each instance of the real, “once formed, [...] will follow its own nature,” being to some extent “inviolable” until death. “Consciousness is able to hold its own sense of identity by accepting one probability” at a time, by “maintaining identity throughout a lifetime” through “weaving in and out of probabilities,” by jumping, that is, “in leapfrog fashion over

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<sup>728</sup> UR, 23.

<sup>729</sup> UR, 27.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> UR, 140-141.

events it does not want to actualize and [thus] does not admit as experience.”<sup>732</sup> The individual “draws from the bank of [events] certain ones that are significant” and that “will result in what then seem to be predictable experience,” and accomplishes this “selection” primarily at a neurological level and from a “present” (“that as a meeting-point of probabilities”) is thus just a thin moment stretched over probabilities. The result is “actuality”: “the present image [of self] seems to be the only possible one,” “the body appears permanent and in existence from one moment to the next,”<sup>733</sup> and a “mass history” without “gaps or discrepancies” comes about.<sup>734</sup>

THEIR NONCOINCIDENCE...: “Every probable event that could happen to you, happens,” and since “such endless creativity can seem so dazzling that the individual would appear lost within it,” “it is extremely important [to] bear in mind [...] *the presence of your identity as you think of it*,” its separateness from those of its variations outside its past or present and foreclosed from the future. For even though “all probable variations of any one event occur,” “in practical terms of sense data, those worlds do not [always] meet” the one considered actual because “your attention span simply does not include them,” the brain being capable of handling only one stream of data. So “your own experience or individuality... rides secure” through this “network [...] of unpredictability, in which multitudinous other actions could have occurred”<sup>735</sup> ...

... AND MUTUAL DIFFERENTIATION: “... and [which] in other realities do occur,”<sup>736</sup> partly because whenever the “incipient selves... around [the] main personality” become distinct and autonomous enough to realize themselves, they “will literally spring apart from the time-space you know” and “become unreal” to you in order to “exist” as themselves. The temporal branching and virtualization of the self nonetheless leaves “traces” in it of these departed potentials or “abilities” that can still be and are constantly “actualized,”<sup>737</sup> and this coming and going of virtual and actual is also their mutual constitution: “fields of probabilities are... sources of your reality,” which in turn “is also a source for these.”<sup>738</sup>

... would seem, again, to conform to Deleuze’s understanding (in *Cinema II*) of time. Except for the fact that I immediately add that “*consciousness also learns to handle [these] alternate moments as it ‘matures’... forming as it does a new, larger framework of identity*,” that “*there are psychological structures that are quite capable of holding their own identities while being aware of a given number of probable selves*.”<sup>739</sup> Because once such claims begin in the next chapters, interpreting them as those above were becomes untenable for the simple reason that the experience on the part of the self of other, potential and nonpresent versions of itself (if such could be) would entail the running together of the actuality it is supposed to be with the virtuality it also is. In

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<sup>732</sup> UR, 43.

<sup>733</sup> UR, 59-60.

<sup>734</sup> UR, 151.

<sup>735</sup> UR, 31.

<sup>736</sup> UR, 31.

<sup>737</sup> UR, 44.

<sup>738</sup> UR, 141.

<sup>739</sup> UR, 42.

other words, if the self is, “because of its probable existences,” “at the same time...in [present] time and out of it,” and also *somehow experiences this*, its “probable realities” are indeed “fields of actuality” not just through their being called or imagined to be so but because *there would thus in the end be no means of distinguishing between actualities and their virtualities*, what they potentially are, were, or may still be. Were it the case, that is, that a given situation and those potentially antecedent or subsequent to it could occur in the same piece of experience—a self, for example, experiencing a potential past, present, or future right now—then changing the meanings of actual, virtual, and potential would be required. Deleuze, that is, would have to be understood quite differently than he has been.

Deleuze would need, in brief, to be understood as having left unelaborated in his texts their most crucial “potential,” the resources for conceiving the transformation into each other of the subject and its other, virtual potentials, the becoming-actual of these virtualities in a self or consciousness that would at the same time become this virtual now no longer opposable to the actual but instead merged with it, into another modality of the real. Becoming, in other words, would have to be reconceived (as first encounters with it mistakenly lead one to think is already the case...) as a process whereby realities change into each other and that extends all the way into those corresponding to the modalities ascribed to the real.<sup>740</sup>

*Becoming itself will have to become if consciousness is to change...* this thought will be set at immediately, after which its consequences for ethics and spirituality, God and man, and time will be developed.

We will begin with two interlaced claims from above: that the self is at once in and out of the present, and that it can somehow experience this.

#### “PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES CAPABLE OF HOLDING THEIR OWN IDENTITIES WHILE BEING AWARE OF THEIR OTHER, PROBABLE SELVES...”

“I do not want to ruin your idea of stability,” is how I now broach the intellectual and existential difficulties posed by this self-consciousness-of-being-another. “The fact remains that in speaking of probabilities [before this book], I have simplified the issues considerably, [using] ideas and terms quite easily grasped. The larger picture is more difficult—by far—to express.”<sup>741</sup>

“I am saying that I am ready to lead you beyond these necessary preliminaries.”<sup>742</sup>

“The present idea of the soul, you see” — remember that psyche carries for me both an ancient and modern, spiritual and psychological sense — “is a ‘primitive’ idea that can scarcely begin to explain the creativity or reality from which mankind’s being comes. You *are*

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<sup>740</sup> Catherine Malabou’s work, especially *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2011) and *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), has been crucial to the development of this perspective on the need and prospect of transforming what is meant by and what one experiences as actuality. Although Malabou herself does not pursue this particular issue of actuality, her development of an (ontico-) ontology of transformation spares no modality of being or philosopheme from the possibility of being changed. Moreover, her thought accords a central role to the imagination (as a force that schematizes the real) and thus exercised great influence on the development of the argument made through Sartre and Roberts at the end of this chapter.

<sup>741</sup> UR, 41.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

multipersons. You exist in many times and places at once. *You exist as one person, simultaneously [and so] your inner reality straddles their realities.*”<sup>743</sup>

“Even your atomic structure is poised between probabilities. If this true, then obviously ‘you’ are aware of only one small probable portion of yourself—and *this portion you protect as your identity*. If you think of it, then, as simply a focus take by ‘your’ greater identity, then you will be able to follow what I am saying without feeling puny, by contrast, or lost.”<sup>744</sup>

“You can know [this] by stretching your concepts of personhood and awareness,” which I begin to sketch with three examples.<sup>745</sup> “You think of one I-self as the primary and ultimate end of evolution. Yet there are [...] other identities with many such I-selves, each as aware and independent as your own, while also being aware of a greater identity in which they have their being.”<sup>746</sup>

“*Other kinds of psychological gestalts* have been and are being tried throughout time,” that is, “some that would appear quite inconceivable to you...”<sup>747</sup>

There have been experiments upon earth with both men and animals... herds of animals, for example, [where] each animal is quite aware of the joint knowledge of the herd, the dangers to be encountered in any individual territory, and a psychological structure in which the mass consciousness of the herd recognized the individual consciousness of each animal, and protected it... There was a constant give-and-take between the individual animal and the mass herd consciousness.<sup>748</sup>

It is [also] quite possible... for several selves to occupy a body, and were this the norm it would be easily accepted. That implies another kind of multipersonhood, however, one actually allowing for the fulfillment of many abilities [...] usually left unexpressed. It also implies a freedom and organization of consciousness [...] unusual in your system of reality.

(“*Some people are going to hook up all this with possession, aren’t they?*,” I asked.)  
Not when I am finished.<sup>749</sup>

In some systems of physical existence, a multipersonhood is established in which three or four ‘persons’ emerge from the same [psyche], each one utilizing to the best of its abilities those characteristics of its own. *This presupposes a gestalt of awareness, however, in which each knows the activities of the others, and participates; and you have a [still] different version of mass consciousness.*<sup>750</sup>

“...These concepts alone,” I continue, “*do* alter your present consciousness, and change it in degree.”<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>743</sup> UR, 50.

<sup>744</sup> UR, 41.

<sup>745</sup> UR, 51.

<sup>746</sup> UR, 48.

<sup>747</sup> UR, 49.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> UR, 50.

<sup>751</sup> UR, 50.

“For consciousness must by its nature change” as it “learns to handle [these] alternate moments... forming as it does a new, larger framework of identity.”<sup>752</sup>

Reconnecting these “other consciousnesses” to the question of their theoretical viability (considering whether they are possible, our philosopher is whispering here, is for now too complex, given that the question concerns potential itself...), we can now ask just what Deleuze would make of them, these ostensible “*psychological structures capable of holding their own identities while being aware of [their other,] probable selves...*”<sup>753</sup>

#### THE ONE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE OTHER

The immediate answer (the author and his philosophical counterpart making it available to me) has already to some extent been seen: the virtual part of us “*not having the form of... a personal consciousness or a subjective identity,*”<sup>754</sup> there can be no self-experience of being the many potentials constituting it, of immediate, self-evident identification with them. Whatever the affinities between us, *the person and its consciousness always remain for Deleuze beached in actuality* where they can but gaze from the outside at the currents and waves of (their) various potentials.

No doubt the opposite at first appears the case. The most widely read of his books begins, for instance, with the famous declaration (made with its coauthor) that “the two of us wrote... together,” but “since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd” so that “[w]e are no longer ourselves... we have been... multiplied.”<sup>755</sup> Casual reading often results in such statements being taken as an indication that the self is in essence the experience of a conglomerate of psychological identities instead of the brash notice of counteractualization it is. Other passages from the text, however, clarify that the “multiplied” individual—here, this writer-crowd—is “depersonalized,” not pluralized into a host of selves.<sup>756</sup> “There are no individual statements,” a pair of them from “Postulates of Linguistics” read, since every utterance is “the product of an assemblage of enunciation,” “a constellation of voices” or speech genres that precede every subject and are thus “not given in [its] conscious mind.”<sup>757</sup> Hence effective writing requires “bringing this assemblage to light” through “selecting the whispering voices... and secret idioms” in it, a process, however, that occurs not through voluntarily identifying with or integrating them into oneself, but “when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization” (which is why, the scholars tell me to note, writing is figured there as “mediumistic” and like “the séance table”).<sup>758</sup> So even if Deleuze elsewhere accords a great role in thinking to personas coming again from outside the individual (our philosopher is directing us to the discussions of “conceptual personae”...<sup>759</sup>), these do not enter and take shape as its other personalities: the person would have long before become unconscious and whatever speaks through it would remain as composite as our potentials (potentials that could not be persons).

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<sup>752</sup> UR, 41.

<sup>753</sup> UR, 42.

<sup>754</sup> LOS, 99.

<sup>755</sup> ATP, 3.

<sup>756</sup> ATP, 42.

<sup>757</sup> ATP, 93.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> See the third chapter of *WIP?*.

Depersonalization is construed as being necessary for connecting to these potentials because consciousness seems to him permanently locked into the form of the person, which in turn locks back into consciousness; consciousness and the person, that is, are almost synonymous with each other for this philosopher, and therein lies the crux of our disagreement and my interest in him: stranger that I am to philosophy, neither this equation nor the definitions attributed its terms need be considered sufficient or a done deal. Other forms of consciousness and personhood even seem to me to be growing right in the midst of his books... “Consciousness,” reads one of Deleuze’s more famous characterizations of it, from “Immanence: A Life” (a text that is, for me, about consciousness), “becomes a fact only when a subject is produced at the same time as its object.” “The transcendental field,” on the other hand (the name given in this text and others to the virtual side of the real), “cannot be defined by consciousness.”<sup>760</sup>

Some of what motivates these definitions will be immediately apparent: virtual potentials, being unlocalizable and therefore outside intelligible genre, sensible form, and their agreement, cannot be identical with consciousness insofar as the latter proceeds primarily through those cognitive means. More precisely, the subject-object structure considered the basic form of consciousness can only be derived from them, since potential is without identity. Deleuze elsewhere makes clear why. Consciousness only appears intrinsic to experience, he explains, because the meanings of statements are normally presumed to be predicates attributable to the form of a substrate “capable of functioning as their support or principle of unification” (characteristics belonging to the reality of a something = x), and the naturalization of this arbitrary “relation between sense and object” brings about not just objective realities but also “personal consciousness.”<sup>761</sup> “The form of the person” is effectuated, on the one hand, when the meaning of certain parts of language are thought to correspond to the human individual as substrate, while “personal consciousness,” on the other, comes about because this identity is conceived as being itself capable of affixing meanings to objects through “designating” them in this same way (this is where, our philosopher tells me, the two current senses of “the subject” converge).<sup>762</sup> “A doubling... of two subjects,” as another text puts it, can then occur wherein the “mental reality” of the person first formed through its being designatable as such becomes capable of “issuing a subject of the statement” (the old linguistic notion, the anthropologist now speaking, of a subject present in a statement but nonetheless distinct from the one who uttered it) through which it is itself designated, and so on.<sup>763</sup> “Consciousness... is precisely that doubling of subjects” because the transposition or disappearance of the psychological person believing itself capable of self-reference into the ‘I’ through which it does so nonetheless has the effect of enabling the latter to “resupply” the uttering person so that it can once again designate itself. This constant “echolalia” gives rise to a person that identifies itself as a “something=x” common to and therefore underlying various psychological states as the one who undergoes them and therefore knows and recognizes them as his own.<sup>764</sup>

Consciousness (in all the modes attributed to it) being an effect whose putative self-genesis is just (metaleptic) “sleight-of-hand” is therefore what puts it outside potential and inside actual experience. But this also makes it “impotence” itself, since the individual

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<sup>760</sup> *PI*, 26.

<sup>761</sup> *LOS*, 111.

<sup>762</sup> *LOS*, 118.

<sup>763</sup> *ATP*, 129.

<sup>764</sup> *ATP*, 131, 129.



experiencing itself from within these forms blocks out the other potentials it also (virtually) is. (Hence the transcendental ends up “denatured” when consciousness and person are ascribed to it.)

While little of this is news (previous chapters basically said the same thing), reiterating it with respect to consciousness brings us to the place where your Deleuze is in need of some revision; of *seeing*, that is, in a novel way... For the crux of both my disagreement with and interest in him lies in this treatment of consciousness and the person as both synonymous and unified: stranger that I am to philosophy, neither this equation nor the definitions attributed its terms need be considered sufficient or a done deal. Other forms of consciousness and personhood even seem to me to be growing out of his books and taking shape...

Consciousness, that is, is doubled by another consciousness in Deleuze, to the point that it can be conceived as concretely yielding the other, double or multiple consciousnesses of which I have been speaking. The term carries in “Immanence: A Life” another meaning quite different than the one we just saw it does. The question serving as the point of departure of the text — “what is a transcendental field?” or (our terms), what is potentiality? — receives the surprising, because seemingly unwarranted and contradictory, answer of “a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness... [a] consciousness without a self.”<sup>765</sup>

If consciousness is only what we were just led to think it is, it becomes difficult to imagine what such a consciousness could be: not having the form of personal identity through which it could represent itself to itself and thereby objectify, reflect, and turn back upon itself would seem to condemn it to being only a primitive, vague awareness... not of existing or even of being alive (these senses would, the philosopher says, require language and concepts), not seemingly of anything; just awareness of... Which is almost what Deleuze says when he next defines this nonsubjective, impersonal cognizance: “however close two sensations may be [it is] the passage from one to the other as becoming, as increase or decrease in power (virtual quantity).”<sup>766</sup> The initial obscurity surrounding the formula lifts when the tie previously noted between sensation and power is recalled: whenever an individual gets connected to another individual and empowered or disempowered, a sensation is produced; so the interval between such occurrences or the transition between them would somehow involve or be consciousness. Remembering, too, that the question at bottom concerns potential, the rationale for this assertion becomes evident: a “consciousness of transition” (in both senses of the genitive) would be the experience of the sheer potential to... previously examined (the potential diminished whenever something actually does or is something) and that would have to some extent to occur upon depersonalization and “the desubjectivation of consciousness.” Exiting actual experience or consciousness would have, Deleuze sees, to result in *an experience of potential* that would be but *a potential for experience* and so *an almost* (or virtually) *actual awareness*; nothing definite, just an almost-awareness. Given the evidence for the (near-) logical necessity of such an experience, Deleuze grants that it could be “necessary” to “define the transcendental... by [this] pure immediate consciousness with neither object nor self.”<sup>767</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> *PI*, 25.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>767</sup> *PI*, 26.

But for reasons mostly just scrutinized, this thought is immediately rescinded: “the relation of the transcendental field to consciousness is only... conceptual [*de droit*]”—for now, capable of being logically postulated but untenable—because “consciousness,” as was just seen, “becomes *a fact* only when a subject is produced at the same time as its object,” which then puts them “outside the field.”<sup>768</sup> So even though there is indeed “the consciousness coextensive with it,” “as long as consciousness traverses the transcendental” or (as) potential this way such that it is “everywhere diffused, nothing is able to reveal it,” it is by definition “removed from revelation,” that is from “appearing,” coming to light, phenomenality.<sup>769</sup> In other words, despite there being a (quasi-) consciousness or an experience of potential, there is really or in fact consciousness or experience only after one has been cast from potential and into the subject-object form (the something=*x* or *subjectum*) of consciousness; the other consciousness, because it cannot be brought to consciousness or appearance, is no consciousness. This is the first meaning of (what the philosopher is telling me is) this instance of the distinction between principle and fact that Deleuze often employs: because experience knows only phenomenal consciousness, the consciousness of potential could only exist in principle. But this also means: consciousness pertains only to the world of experience, fact, object, and the person such that there would be no consciousness of potential.

So then why introduce this impersonal, potential consciousness at all? Most readers of Deleuze can furnish the manifest, didactic reasons (phenomenology needed, our philosopher is saying, to be dealt a finishing blow...), but these are mostly inessential. The more profound impetus is that relentlessly drawing and maintaining this distinction between virtual and actual—between potential on the one hand and form, consciousness, and experience on the other—and then basing an ethics on it required him not only to consider this other consciousness but to pursue and even valorize it, despite the contradictions.

Since the increase of power or potential at the center of his ethics requires, again, becoming more potential than actual, the depersonalization of consciousness will result whenever this process is taken far enough. This is why Deleuze continues in this text to presume and describe such a consciousness immediately after denying it the right and possibility of really being a consciousness or anything essential. Having resumed his definition of the transcendental or potential field and equated it with life instead of any consciousness, he nevertheless comes right back to the latter concept when he next characterizes the transcendental as the “impersonal” awareness on the part of a contemptible, hated man (from Charles Dickens’ *Our Mutual Friend*) of the compassion being on the verge of death elicits from people usually his enemies (he has in this “coma” a vague experience of their “eagerness” and “even love” as “something soft and sweet penetrating him”) and as the quite similar asubjective, “indefinite” nonconsciousness apparent in the behavior of a newborn or infant.<sup>770</sup>

Yet such a pseudo- or limit-consciousness is also for Deleuze more than a mere effect or byproduct of existing at the threshold of actuality; it is also a state of blessedness. The rouge is said here to “attain a sort of beatitude” from being between life and death and half-aware of it; and the baby, “bliss” and “pure power,” as though both had undergone

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<sup>768</sup> *PI*, 26.

<sup>769</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>770</sup> *PI*, 28.

some sort of divinization or transmutation.<sup>771</sup> No doubt the counteractualized are treated as blessed because power and therefore the source of creativity have been put outside actuality (this we already know). But no doubt, too, that these traditional qualities of the divine are ascribed to a sphere outside actuality because of what was earlier called the theological residuum of Deleuze's work: even if conceived as chance, chaos, divergence, and multiplicity, the side of the real evincing these characteristics functions as a God in that man must find and return to if he is to introduce more of these qualities into reality and himself. (Being an imagined demigod did not lead me to withhold from mortals so much power and reality.) Though no substitute for the case for it that will have to be made, this God is in evidence in the text both when anthropological consciousness and existence is characterized as both "falling outside" potential and what the latter is often falsely "attributed to" (as a usurped power would be) and where potential is characteristically described as "pure," "lacking in nothing," and as what becomes "incarnated" in "a state of things or life" it comes "before."<sup>772</sup> So the "transcendence" otherwise rigorously dissociated here from the transcendental nonetheless appears to remain functionally characteristic of it, and this hierarchy significantly determines Deleuze's otherwise largely inexplicable choice to accord consciousness the central role it plays here. Man will at bottom remain divorced from his (non-anthropological and nomadic) essence unless he exits actuality in order to assume and become what he already is and profoundly alter through that the nature of his consciousness and experience so that these lose personal form.

But what demands this change makes it at the same time impossible. "There is a big difference," go the famous last words of the article, "between the virtuals that define the... transcendental field and the possible forms that actualize them."<sup>773</sup> In other words (that were previously examined), there is always the exchange and differentiation of the two spheres. Becoming the unfixed potential that is every essence is foreclosed to actual beings and from their experience: since the nature of virtual and actual is to trade places and distinguish themselves from each other, no being can ever become completely counteractualized.

*Becoming can neither transform the person into the God (virtually) inside it nor consciousness into a different form. Both remain for Deleuze locked into each other and an actuality that thereby remains in a certain way the same.*

The other consciousness nonetheless remains both a constant theme and continually unresolved problem at the core of much of Deleuze's thought. Certain chapters, for example, that appear to me (our philosopher confirms it...) central to *The Logic of Sense* for first grappling with the issue of counteractualization pose the question of how it would be possible to open through it to potential without smashing or doing a "demolition job" on the self.<sup>774</sup> The famous passage on suicide furnished as a response evinces the same dilemma we just saw: although the "transmutation" of actuality (as it is explicitly called) required for reaching potential would have in this case "to bring together the two faces of death"—"personal death" and "death as event" or virtual—so that the latter could be "prolonged" and turned through this from something "with no relation to me" into a consciously experienced, "personal act," this possibility is immediately cast as an "illusion" since "an entire difference of nature subsists between what is joined together."<sup>775</sup> Depersonalization

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<sup>771</sup> *PI*, 28-29.

<sup>772</sup> *PI*, 31.

<sup>773</sup> *PI*, 32.

<sup>774</sup> *LOS*, 157.

<sup>775</sup> *LOS*, 156.

“transfigures,” “transmutes,” and leads to “the rebirth” of the person, but the divide separating it from potential is never surmounted so that this metamorphosis strangely remains invisible and outside the consciousness of the one undergoing it (the “figure” produced by it but “substitutes” for her life).

Being a philosophical outsider and but imaginary theoretician leaves me constitutionally disinclined to catch thinkers in their contradictions or expose these as aporias constitutive of their thought; nor can demonstrating the possibility and resilience of the sort of dialectic partially at work here really be my business (the philosopher in our author, however, is shouting at me that most of what was articulated through him here presumes and addresses this...). What instead interests me in these passages on consciousness is their other potential: their very potential for conceptually realizing the other consciousness they as yet only simultaneously postulate and eschew, which is at the same time their potential for realizing another version of themselves comprising what they could until then have just “really” been along with what would have otherwise merely remained their other possibilities. Where this other consciousness briefly awakens in Deleuze is precisely the strange, hallucinatory place where the seemingly insurmountable barrier dividing actualities from their potentials can be scaled or bored through and, either way, collapsed.

A last, brief trip to one of these places affords an edge for the jump. Right after a long discussion in “Becoming-Intense, Becoming Animal...” of how the counteractualized individual necessarily “becomes imperceptible” through having largely passed out of form and into potential (this placement, the philosopher is saying, is quite significant...<sup>776</sup>), the same dilemma about consciousness again arises as the notion of a mode of perception corresponding and explicitly linked to the other consciousness is introduced but then very quickly eschewed.

Their relentless, shifting variability putting them always “between things” or objectivities, we read, potentials are forever “below and above... threshold[s] of perception” since the latter, while “relative” from having different reaches or scopes, nonetheless “operate only as a function of a perceptible form and a perceived, discernible subject,” through, that is, the structure of consciousness.<sup>777</sup> “However... an immediate correction” must be made (the other consciousness again rubbing its eyes) since such potentials, while necessarily “imperceptible,” are “also the *percipiendum*,” and “there is no contradiction in this.”<sup>778</sup> Whenever one has “jumped,” we are told, from “the plane... [of] forms perceptible to a perceiving subject” and onto “the *other* plane” (of potential) where “the composition” of that ordinary consciousness occurs, this latter plane “must be perceived, cannot but be perceived at the same time as what it composes or renders” since it is “an absolute threshold” beyond all “the relative thresholds” of consciousness.<sup>779</sup> Reaching is the same as exposing it, that is, because “perception will confront its limit” there and must; “it will no longer reside in the relation between subject and object” if it goes there, but at its point of impossibility, that same “between” or “midst of things” of potential.<sup>780</sup> This time, though,

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<sup>776</sup> Becoming-imperceptible, I would argue, is effectively accorded the status of the (final) end of the various becomings (becoming woman, animal, etc.) discussed in the text by being treated after them and declared the “last” becoming.

<sup>777</sup> *ATP*, 281.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>780</sup> *ATP*, 311.

limit-perception is not the other consciousness (hence there being, ostensibly, “no contradiction”). “The imperceptible,” we next read, “becomes necessarily perceived *at the same time as* perception becomes necessarily molecular,” meaning perception “arrives at holes” and “microintervals between matters, colors, and sounds,” “eliminate[s] forms and persons” from its field, and acquires through this a basic form as much like the nonlocal, differential moving elements of potential as possible.<sup>781</sup> This “nonfigurative... micro-perception” is said to emerge for the simple reason that the “change [of] perception”<sup>782</sup> called for here cannot really be achieved if all it amounts to is an experience of the impossibility of experiencing potential (of “going blank”<sup>783</sup>). Consciousness—actual consciousness—will have to morph into another kind of consciousness if the experience of (its) “going blank” is to be recuperated so that there can indeed be change.

Microperception could seem, then, to offer a means for evading the double bind placed on consciousness by the theological residuum of [the virtual] (“you should and will experience the character of the real...” “...a character that cannot possibly be experienced”). Although it cannot cross their divide, it makes visible in the actual an image or semblance of the properly invisible domain of potential and thereby brings the perceiver closer to its real nature. But consistent with his still-theological inclinations, Deleuze backtracks from the thought he seems to be venturing: “even this is done,” he remarks about the alteration of perception, “in the context of a relativity of thresholds that are restricted to *imitating* the [other] plane” for the reason that “the imperceptible and perception continually pursue or run after each other without ever truly coupling,” ever translate and transfer into each other without coinciding.<sup>784</sup> Since consciousness, that is, cannot contravene this difference in nature, altering it so that it conforms to potential amounts only to a mimetic act incapable of effecting change outside appearances. Even though this is noted so that better solutions can be found for contending with the virtual, this recourse to the language of mimeticism brings things back to what for us has been the central problem. If the form of consciousness is at all capable of mimetically copying potential, than potential can also indeed function as a model or ideal. The theological dimension of Deleuze’s thought is precisely what in it forecloses the metamorphosis of consciousness.

This is why the explanation furnished for the failure of consciousness concerns its confusion of the two domains. Molecular perception eventually turns back in on the perceiver so that “the microperceptions are overlaid in advance... by “delusions,” “fantasies” (in the psychoanalytic sense), and “paranoid outbursts,” which all “restore forms and subjects,” relock consciousness into the person, keep the self “on the shore.”<sup>785</sup>

But what would happen if the jump could be made awake? So that perception of the multiple, overlapping elements of potential could be made out through the lens of the person... What if experience could become organized into a gestalt through which what the self actually is took place alongside what is would no longer only potentially be? And the “God-concept” still present in Deleuze changed?

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<sup>781</sup> ATP, 282.

<sup>782</sup> ATP, 313.

<sup>783</sup> See Brian Massumi, *Parables of The Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>784</sup> ATP, 314.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid.

“ANOTHER SELF, ABLE TO HOLD BOTH LINES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AT ONCE...”

*“Your idea of one psyche, one self,” I keep repeating, “[indeed] blinds you to these other realities, [yet] larger concepts of personhood will indeed lead you to some glimpse [other,] truly remarkable gestalts of consciousness.”*<sup>786</sup>

But how concepts alone could bring about even an image of such consciousnesses nonetheless constitutes a huge problem for me. Although my insistent proclamations of the reality, exigency, and eventuality of another form of consciousness are precisely what allowed us to discern a need and desire for it within philosophy, I nonetheless quite readily acknowledge the existence of ordinary consciousness to be the most formidable obstacle to the congealing of the other kind. So instead of pretending (as might still be expected of me) that this other consciousness could be achieved through just declaring it conceptually so, my thought surveys in its own, always peculiar way the contours of the existing consciousness in order to find the dips or weak points in it through which it could be surmounted and the other one awakened. It does this first through what most of you would regard as a fabricated analysis of ordinary consciousness and its origins and then by drawing out the consequences of this for the possibility of the other-consciousness.

FABULATED ANALYSIS: “Your system,” I admit in the chapter where we left off, “does *not* [generally] include the kind of experience mentioned earlier, where the body is able to contain the experience of many selves.”<sup>787</sup> “This is because mankind’s consciousness [...] experimented along certain lines” and “various biological and mental methods of selectivity and discrimination were utilized” until what can be called ego-consciousness emerged: an experience oriented to object, individuated self, time.<sup>788</sup>

“All such psychological structures,” I begin explaining, “are composed of [...] units of consciousness,”<sup>789</sup> the prephysical atoms, you may recall, I claim to be the fundamental stuff of the real (references to which the philosopher would prefer remain muted, even as the anthropologist insists on unveiling them...). These units are “endowed with unpredictability”<sup>790</sup> “but also move toward organizations of a selective nature,” “a focus upon certain probable events above others, [...] a selection of pattern. The particular kind of significance settled upon acts both as a directive for experience and as a method for erecting effective boundaries (whole groups will repel whole other groups...).”<sup>791</sup> “The units form themselves into systems they have initiated, transform themselves into [such] structured reality,”<sup>792</sup> “including into what you think of as mind, around which the structure of the brain is formulated. Because of this selectivity (because it is repeated at all levels), the particular selectivity of your kind of consciousness rides over lapses that you do not recognize... ‘holes of nonexistence’ are plugged up by the process of selectivity.”<sup>793</sup>

“[Now] while your particular kind of consciousness was developing” as and among prehistoric man, “it began to intensify selectivity, to concentrate specifically in a small area of activity while blocking out other data. This was necessary because the particular kind of

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<sup>786</sup> UR, 51-52.

<sup>787</sup> UR, 52.

<sup>788</sup> UR, 69-70.

<sup>789</sup> UR, 40.

<sup>790</sup> UR, 39.

<sup>791</sup> UR, 48.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

<sup>793</sup> UR, 60.

physical manipulation [peculiar to] of corporeal existence required instant physical response to immediately present stimuli.<sup>794</sup> [One] had to respond at once to the present situation... the present animal had to be killed for food—not the past animal, for physical survival depended on it. Yet when [...] mankind recalled his past [...], it was possible for him to confuse past and present. Vivid memories, out of context but given immediate neurological validity, could compete with the brilliant focus necessary in his present. At deeply unconscious levels the neurological structure is more highly adaptable than it appears. Adjustments were made, therefore... [Since] the specialized ‘new’ consciousness in one body had to respond pinpoint fast [...], it focused on upon only one series of neurological messages. These became the biological and mentally accepted ones... the only official data that, translated into sense perception, formed physical reality.”<sup>795</sup>

“The ego [thus] formed specialized with objects,” but that was not all. “At that point, consciousness... could not handle [...] the emergence of ego consciousness while simultaneously experiencing powerful feelings of oneness with large groups. It was struggling for individuation [...] what you thought of as the boundaries and integrity of ‘one selfhood.’ [Hence] the formation of tribes, which allowed man to behave cooperatively, while still in small numbers.”<sup>796</sup>

“So while you were so concerned with protecting what you thought of as the boundaries and integrity of ‘one selfhood,’ you actually arrived at a point where you were beginning to deny your greater reality [...].”<sup>797</sup> I bring it all back, that is, to the dilemma of the self—the present system does not contain this self, but is in sore need of it.

“It would have been quite possible,” however, “for you as a species to have chosen other ‘series’ of neurological pulses or messages as the ‘real’ ones, and to structure your experience along different lines. [Now] were ego consciousness to reach a certain point... where experience in the present became extensive enough, then [it] could again begin to accept greater data. Indeed, it is now at that stage, its focus in the present now secure.”<sup>798</sup>

So goes my own account of consciousness as well as of the route through which it could be altered into something else. Given the fabulous quality of these claims about the origins, character, and means of changing extant consciousness, it would seem the next step would be to proffer equally imaginative solutions for breaking out of it. Yet what follows this fabulation is a rather rational reckoning of...

THE CONCRETE CONSEQUENCES: “Because you identify your experience with th[is] regular line of consciousness,” I am soon declaring, “you are rarely able to ‘bring in’ any ‘other self’... and hold it while retaining your own sense of identity... *You would basically have to ‘lose’ your own consciousness in order to perceive the other-consciousness.*”<sup>799</sup> The sudden appearance a few chapters later of such a constrained, self-limiting account of this possibility...

Without understanding or training [it goes almost in full] you would have to ‘lose’ your own consciousness in order to perceive the ‘other-consciousness.’

There is a correlation here [the rest reads] with something Jane said in [...] her class last evening... writing can be, first, a method of standing apart from life [...] in order

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<sup>794</sup> UR, 70.

<sup>795</sup> UR, 69-70.

<sup>796</sup> UR, 73-74.

<sup>797</sup> UR, 74-75.

<sup>798</sup> UR, 72.

<sup>799</sup> UR, 124.

to capture” and “preserve the unutterable uniqueness of any given day. But, she said, you can then discover that the writing itself becomes the day’s experience. You are then ‘lost’ in the writing as much as you feared being lost in normal living, with no way to step aside and view the experience. My addition [...] to those remarks is this: You would need the creation, then, of another ‘self,’ who stood aside from the writing self in order to preserve the original intent,” who would thus basically encompass or be aware of being these other selves that would nonetheless also remain distinct.

In the same way you could not, practically speaking, experience such other-consciousness... unless you learned to stand somewhat aside, like the writer in Jane’s remarks. But even if you did, *the very experience of other-consciousness itself would supersede your living space. You would need another self, able to hold both lines of consciousness at once, lost in neither but maintaining footing in each. This would be a very difficult achievement in normal life in any sustained fashion.*<sup>800</sup>

... this account will at first read as reversal or capitulation with respect to all the assumptions about consciousness my text and the interpretation it has inspired in the writer have opposed, as though it were suddenly being conceded that the consciousness of self must indeed go entirely under if another of its potentials is to come in and be realized. Unless, however, it is remembered that no matter what I, Seth, am construed as being (considering me to be only a fantasy of Jane’s would help more than hurt what follows...), the thoughts identified as equaling or proceeding from me are no doubt articulated in response to Jane’s own; for then the intelligence—eventually even the cunning—of acknowledging instead of papering over the difficulties actual consciousness poses for the other consciousnesses will become apparent.

What these remarks really evince is cognizance on our split-together part of the incompatibility of the one form of consciousness with the other. Since my characterization of personal consciousness has it “specialized with physical objects” and their “manipulation,” the condition and result of a corresponding sociopsychic “individuation,” and an orientation to the present enabling these to be distinguished from their otherwise overwhelming pasts, its being fabulously articulated ought not distract from its rather precise description of the structure of existing consciousness—a form that in rendering experience into distinct, present objective unities also does the same to the [being] it does this for (so that the latter is always aware of experience being its own)—that is also quite proximate to Deleuze’s (the object=x applied to the self being just a step away). Now if my thought has even the least consistency, there would be little reason for me to pretend that an individual accordingly structured would be readily or at all capable of experiencing the one self it always thus is as, at the same time, other centers of experience (which it would thus “also” experience). The other consciousnesses, in other words, whose forms are supposed to involve this same unity of self-experience being either simultaneously refracted into several perspectives and agencies specific or “interior” to its body or else at once both singular from belonging to one body and plural with respect to the experiences of other bodies it would somehow cognitively participate in from the “outside,” would be structures almost impossible for apperceptive consciousness to inhabit or attain, its one being one and its two being two. Hence the foregoing account of the improbability of converting the one

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<sup>800</sup> UR, 124-125.



consciousness into the other as well as other acknowledgements of the barriers a series of its conditions and elements pose to this: “Language,” to begin with, “make[s]... translations” between them “highly difficult”; “stratified concepts of one-personhood” (conceived here as an element of “culture”) “cause you to transpose” these upon “other kinds of consciousness... not native to your culture” but existing “in your species” such that these go unrecognized; and the brain encounters “neural confusion” whenever brief instances of such experience do emerge. The net result is that abnormal states of consciousness such as multiple personality or most spirit possession—where “personalities... alternate,” with “only one dominant at any given time”—thus remain far short of the other consciousnesses’ ostensible capacity for being “aware of [...] the experiences of all its egos” at the same time.<sup>801</sup>

Instead of making mental illness or the brain my *deus ex machina*, these last thoughts about them show just how far my acknowledging the persistence and near-inevitability of the interlocking of person and consciousness goes. Extrapolating briefly from them (philosopher, anthropologist, and myself all noting the writer bears a right to interpret me given my own constant espousal of the virtues of interpretation and intelligence...) shows just how far they accord with current understandings of the near-inescapability of extant consciousness. Although neuroses and psychosis were together crucial in provoking the development of the notion of the unconscious, clinical accounts of them never assert that the alterations of consciousness specific to them obliterate apperception or altogether replace it with another form. The dissociation of consciousness from entire groups of thoughts or memories in classical hysterical disorders like *conscience double* or multiple personality, for instance, was repeatedly confirmed to be the result of consciousness’s beliefs (people suffering hysterical paralyses can be tricked, for example, into moving affected limbs by being asked to perform tasks not obviously involving the muscles in them) such that the one center of consciousness turns out to be at the origin of what looks to undermine it. And while schizophrenia can significantly erode apperception by partly replacing it with a delusional and hallucinatory mode of thought in which self and other are poorly distinguished, those suffering from it are only rarely so incapable of experiencing or recognizing themselves that they altogether lose their basic capacity for discerning the objects or other people formed by consciousness. And while neuroscience would seem to undermine the possibility of consciousness being anything but an epiphenomenon of language, its recent redefinition of consciousness as the basic emotional (not classically representational) awareness an organism has of its relation to its environment grants apperception and the object-form more inevitability than they once had by extending this simple form of them to animals and locating it in neural structures (just as I do). Consciousness as it is experienced looks on both counts to be so inevitable that there could be little chance of contravening it wide awake.

So then just how can this be done? How, that is, can the two lines be held together separate, when it seems the one line is all there will ever be?

“ANOTHER SELF WHO-IS-AWARE-OF-BEING IN THE SAME WAY THE WRITER IS AWARE OF THE SELF WHO LIVES”

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<sup>801</sup> UR, 126.

Such a question cannot be addressed head on, however, since it first requires giving a vivid picture of the possibility it concerns.

But at first, however, I am immediately back to declarations that the psyche is “capable of dealing with more than one main line of consciousness” and divergent but “simultaneous material” which nonetheless offer only the beginnings of a response.<sup>802</sup>

“This does not, by the way, mean the development of dual personality,” they begin, affirming what we have just seen.<sup>803</sup> “It means the further expansion of the concept of identity: ‘You’ would not only be aware of the you that you have always known, in the same way that you are now, but a deeper sense of identity would arise. That identity would contain the you that you have always known, and in no way threaten it. The new you would simply be more than you are now. You would just have *[an] expansion of consciousness, another self-who-is-aware-of-being in the same way that—using an analogy, granted—the writer is aware of the self who lives... is the self who lives while being in a position of some apartness, able to comment upon the life upon being lived.*”<sup>804</sup>

“Now in what is admittedly a very small way, that analogy hints,” I pause again, “at the [other-consciousness].”<sup>805</sup>

Although there is a small gain in this description—since consciousness transformed cannot be consciousness divided, it says, it would have to be enlarged so that the unity it presently is would become but one half or part of the new form it would then be (and in which “it” would be at once be both itself and another)—the fact that it just cuts off here nonetheless brings us right back to what seems irresolvable in the question. If in writing about the self she is when not writing, to rephrase it again, the writer (who stands for consciousness) contends in the actuality of the present with a self that has gone to the past and thus become potential to her, then exactly how can this self also actually now be the writer without this writer again becoming her other potential? Since, according to my claims about the other consciousness, “each self dwells entirely in its own dimension” while also simultaneously being just “one stream of consciousness of many” for it, this divergent coincidence can neither be created by the writer sometimes recalling or imagining being selves she presently is not in order to know the entirety of what she is, has been, and may be—those potentials would in that case be brought into a richer, more complex actuality but not maintained as separate from the present—nor achieved (as we have seen) through her bringing them to the present by dissociating herself from it. Rather, this coincidence would instead have to involve her experiencing these potentials as potentials without translating them into actuality or keeping the latter outside them. What the writer is both potentially and actually would have somehow to occur together in one experience without them altogether losing their distinctiveness (“another self would be required... who is the self while being apart from it”). But given that language strains at this thought and credulity at the possibility, the example once more seems a false start.

As too, then, will my going right back to talk of the other consciousness emerging only in “rudimentary fashion” in experiences such as Rob’s having “two simultaneous dreams,” since my claim to him that one of them was a “muddled interpretation” of “the reality... of another portion of yourself” again asserts the other consciousness while barely

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<sup>802</sup> UR, 125.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid.

<sup>805</sup> UR, 126.

broaching the problem of its possibility.<sup>806</sup> Perusing the account of this “double dream” furnished in his introductory notes to the chapter—“I had awakened with certain knowledge that I’d just finished having two dreams at once... I retained conscious memory of one of them before it irrevocably faded”—likewise reveals it to be disappointingly vague.<sup>807</sup>

Except that further scrutiny turns up Rob explaining that after he “decided to ask [me] to discuss the two dreams,” I “once again used a ‘fresh’ event as a basis for book dictation” by obliging him and opening up the entire discussion being so closely examined here.<sup>808</sup> This fact will seem unremarkable until we follow his notes forward and find that he was so struck by the double dream that he asked a close student and friend of Jane’s what she thought of it, and was surprised to learn that she had the same experience on numerous occasions.

“[N]ot only had she done it more than once,” he reports, “but she could recall portions of the simultaneous dreams” and even remembered “a multiple-dream happening” apparently involving numerous streams of consciousness.<sup>809</sup> In the account of the latter she wrote at his request so that it could be inserted into the endnotes of the chapter, the friend explains that it involved seeing herself in ordinary circumstances in which she has a multifaceted vision in which her “head... filled with vivid scenes, like other dreams... hundreds of brilliant scenes”—“expressions of probabilities, ‘past’ and ‘future’ events, sideways events” belonging to “other selves” even as there is “perfect comprehension” of them on her own part — until the distinction between her and these others seems to collapse while being maintained. “I literally become,” she says, “the experience of being myself contained in all of these selves, while being these selves contained in me.”<sup>810</sup> This astonishing dream of achieving something like the consciousness I describe turns out, then, to have also been an occasion for my discussion of the difficulties preventing it. Add the appearance in the endnotes of one more account of a double dream (this one from another writer published by Jane’s press), and both the motive for the session and thus my particular response to the question become clear.

Faced with these instances in themselves of what looks much like my descriptions of the other consciousness, Jane and her interlocutors once more come to her-as-me for clarification. What they in turn receive, although it explains in precise terms just how distant they remain from a consciousness radically different from their own, nevertheless affirms their dreams and visions as yielding its “rudimentary” form. Another consciousness is already taking place among you, I am saying, since consciousness is not always what you think it is. Extant consciousness has other modes—dream, reverie, hallucination—wherein the self and its potentials can appear side by side as one, fused together distinct.

Some other consciousness can be concretely seen right there, where the form of things get arranged differently.

#### JANE’S DOUBLE VISION

Catching a real glimpse of this, however, requires rewinding back to an example of it given elsewhere in my text and then making an unexpected, pragmatic use of some pieces of

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<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> UR, 123.

<sup>808</sup> UR, 122.

<sup>809</sup> UR, 129.

<sup>810</sup> Ibid.

the theory of consciousness of a writer and thinker who has fallen in your times into disuse —Sartre—to understand it.

The chapter containing my fabulation about the origins and structures of the one consciousness follows it with further pronouncements about the eventuality of the other but then appears to trail off again from the issue of how the latter could actually be. The diversion seems this time to be the introduction of the spiritual exercises (these have not been forgotten, our scholars note) so important in *The Unknown Reality*. “Here and throughout this text,” you can read, “there will be sections dealing with ‘Practice Elements’... where you can to some extent see how certain of these concepts can be practically experienced, and receive at least a hint of their application.”<sup>811</sup> But before giving the instructions for the first of these, I first recount a vision of Jane’s much like the experience of being joined to a potential past its practice is supposed to produce...

*In a waking state, Jane found herself in Saratoga Springs, New York, where she grew up, in what seemed to be a kind of mental projection... Everything was gray. The immediate nature of full-blast sense data was missing. Vision was clear but spotty. Motion was, however, the strongest sense element. Jane was bodiless on the one hand, and on the other... perceived some of the experience through the eyes of an infant in a carriage. Quite sharply she perceived a particular curb at the corner of a definite intersection, and her attention was caught by... a curb, a slope of dirt, and then the sidewalk; and the motion of the carriage as it was wheeled up... She visited a store that is not at that location ‘anymore,’ and here the sense data were somewhat clearer...the dark oiled floor, spread with sawdust. Even the odors were present. She [then] toured her grade school, where she attended kindergarten to the third grade, saw the children come out for recess, and felt herself one of them — while during the entire experience she knew herself as an adult...*<sup>812</sup>

... then comment on the significance of this episode of her seeing herself double...

You must understand that your own past exists as vitally as does your present and that your probable pasts and presents exist in the same manner. You simply do not accept them in the strands of experience that ‘you’ recognize. [...] That same past environment *exists now*, alternately with Jane’s present, and as vividly as his present does. It was, however, from this viewpoint, a probable past. He could experience it only by side-stepping officially accepted neurological activity *That same environment exists now, alternately with Jane’s present, and as vividly as his present does*<sup>813</sup>

... and therein seem once more to go no farther toward accounting for the possibility of the other consciousness, the coincidence in it of the two times of two different selves again being asserted but not concretely explained. The matter even gets left at that, since there are no more attempts at explanation in the book apart from those already seen, and what follows is a discussion of why only practicing the exercises can open the other consciousness.

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<sup>811</sup> UR, 75.

<sup>812</sup> UR, 76.

<sup>813</sup> UR, 76.

It is one thing to play with [the] concepts of multidimensionality or probabilities, and quite another to be practically presented with them... when your thought patterns and neurological habits tell you that they cannot be translated.<sup>814</sup>

My final statement being that one should just trust and not judge what one sees in the images.

Now given the intelligence of my treatment of the one consciousness, it would be quite unlikely that this simple assumption about the trustworthiness of potential appearances of the other is my answer to the problem of its possibility. So unless the entire course of thought so far offered for this purpose is really now being left conceptually stranded, the presumption that simple belief in the contents of such images is the next step toward the solution will have to be considered within the horizon of plausibility.

Such a relocation of the question will admittedly at first seem to take us far afield of a solution. But when it is remembered that the problem that keeps recurring for Jane as much as for her present readers is the disagreement between her perception, on the one hand, of coinciding with another self from which she nevertheless remains somewhat distinct and the logic, on the other, of a language only admitting this as contradictory and thus impossible, the possible efficacy in regarding images as capable of bringing about this self-diverging identity becomes apparent. Since what is seen, as Jane's vision shows, need not conform to the logic usually overlaid on it by words, accepting as both real and possible the other, strange forms apparent in her images provides a means of refusing the inevitability of those concepts (of the possible and real) along with a first basis for conceiving them anew. So rather than being foolish credulity, the trust Jane accords as and through me to the content of this vision (by treating it as a real merging of her present self with one in the past) does from this perspective exactly that. It shifts the basis of thought away from what could normally be said about the real toward what is evident in this sight itself by drawing language into conformity with what before could only *look* to be the case.

When we adopt this solution, the other-consciousness attains plausibility: the experience Jane has in her vision of simultaneously being in two times belonging to two otherwise separate instances of herself no longer contradicts the fact that there is consciousness during and "of" the vision. This is because consciousness as such need no longer be treated as equivalent to a single self once language is no longer allowed to make the image conform to it and visual contents disagreeing with it are in turn accepted as furnishing the real. The experience of being twice-over-at-once that was before only conceivable as a limit or impossibility of consciousness can then be conceived as happening *as* consciousness, the latter no longer having to be a unified pole of experience. Experience seeming to occur at two separate but ultimately indistinguishable perspectives can be consciousness to the extent that there is a suspension of belief in the inevitability of the existing bond of conformity between language and most images (the object=x) as well as, therefore, in the attribution of experience to a person having that simple, unified form. Trust that a bifurcated self-image can provide the basis of the real provides the way out.

But what would putting trust in an image—this sort of bifurcated self-image especially—entail? Our previous gloss of the isomorphism presumed to exist between language and the thing or its image already tells us that it could not be a mere, simple matter of believing, with or through words, that what is shown in such an image is a true or real

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<sup>814</sup> UR, 77-78.

state of affairs. Such a statement of belief would, because it assumes the correspondence, either twist what in the image disobeys language back into conformity with it or else fail to reach this self-picture from being without the terms for characterizing it, and, either way, reinforce the old consciousness of self. So the question would have instead to concern how this image could be accepted as the case without being judged (to be) true through propositions; how the image could be granted reality so that it could begin to be understood as itself furnishing a new form of the real, one that language would have to be twisted into conformity with.

This question, it will be said, branches into so many others (the issue of whether there in fact is a phenomenological unity, our philosopher is screaming them at me; what consciousness would be if it is not constitutive, as intentionality, of phenomena; how sensibility can be autonomous with respect to the intelligible via the “logic of the sensible” evident in the work of Lévi-Strauss) that it would be almost impossible to address here (it would take, he continues, reading through much of the phenomenological tradition...). But from my perspective—which sees your times from outside them, and can therefore perceive the links and continuities between philosophies usually conceived as being in disagreement—this is too preemptory a view, since it overlooks how the images in question themselves point right toward the conceptual resources for thinking then, which are hiding in plain sight in the tradition.

#### “WHY ONE PERSON CAN BE SEVERAL AT ONCE” (THE IMAGE)

Closer scrutiny of Jane’s vision initially shows that it was neither received through the senses nor, therefore, in accord with the basic forms of perception. On the one hand, her vision during it is so lacking in the traits normally characteristic of visual perception that another sort of seeing has to be indicated. “Vision was [at once both] *clear* but *spotty*,” the breakdown of the experience she gives through me reads: even though she saw vividly, “everything was gray” instead of colored, and “the immediate nature of full-blast sense data was missing” so that there was something thin or vague about the scene. On the other hand, space and time are unmeasurable in it and thus either glaringly discontinuous or collapsed together: she goes, either from one instant to the other or during the very same moment, from being an infant in a carriage to a child of six or seven years playing outside the elementary school she at that age attended. Since all Jane’s other visions (those recounted here as well the others) also evince these characteristics—her signature phrases “suddenly,” “all at once,” or “without transition” indicating the discontinuous character of the beginnings of her visions and the transitions between their various scenes—it can be assumed that they, too, did not involve visual sense perception or its forms but another sort of seeing.

Such a simple, obvious fact would hardly be worth noting were it not to open directly to one of the sole, recent instances of your philosophical tradition (at least as I read it) where a manifest treatment of the other consciousness occurs. My own scanning of the contents of what even for me are the seemingly endless volumes of the library of your times turns up a book that has fallen out of fashion in them, but which quite surprisingly treats the problem before us and does so in a manner that will finally afford for an understanding of how a rudimentary but literally double consciousness can occur, how this form would have to emerge in images, and how it could be accomplished through a sort of trust or belief. Very few of those readers aware of it would consider the book—*The Psychology of The Imagination*—a likely candidate for inclusion in the library being assembled here, our

philosopher is insisting I note, for the obvious reason that its author, Jean-Paul Sartre, was profoundly committed to the metaphysical conception of the subject that the philosophers that followed him sought to destroy and thus famously hostile to the mysticism of one of their precursors Bataille. Yet these divergences need not be of concern here (even if, the philosopher again remarks, there are reasons they will have to be examined elsewhere), since what Sartre ends up saying when this text is read in light of our questions bears directly on my aims. So we will briefly let this other version of him emerge here as part of us in order to accomplish our aims.

What this Sartre quickly explains about Jane's visions is that their strange characteristics are typical of the specifically imaginary knowledge or imaginative mode of consciousness it is his chief endeavor to establish in the text. They give her the impression of being simultaneously clear and vague along with a discontinuous experience of space and time because they are almost purely mental or psychic in nature and not immediately composed of perceptions. "The image," Sartre says of this internal, visionary type of it, "represents a certain type of consciousness which is completely independent of the perceptual type, and correlatively, a type of existence *sui generis* for its objects."<sup>815</sup> Because "[i]n perception, [we] observe objects" in such a way that "we must learn them" as well—since an "object appears only in a series of profiles" that must be progressively encountered and cognitively maintained (the friend must be encountered as he is...)—it would seem that the same would apply to imagination. Yet in the latter, "knowledge is immediate" and "the image" seen in it "teaches nothing," for while "it is organized [exactly] like the objects that produce knowledge," nonetheless "it is complete at the very moment of its appearance."<sup>816</sup> "No matter how long I may look at an image," he explains, "I will never find anything in it but what I put there."<sup>817</sup> The same friend, when imagined, "suffers from an essential poverty" insofar as the diverse relations he maintains with other entities are reduced to a mere "two or three" significant to the one imagining him; the image is always impoverished in this way because envisioning him is a "magical... incantation destined to produce the object of one's thought, the thing one desires," "a way of *playing* at satisfying" desire despite the absence to the senses of its object, and that must thus accomplish its aim through necessarily spare internal means: "a mental or physical content [of an inner "sensible" quality] which is present only as an 'analogical representative' of the object envisaged" and that condenses meanings directly into images.<sup>818</sup> Since what Jane wants, as Sartre can put it for us, is to make present a form of self absent from reality, she conjures such a "quasi-sensible" image of it, of herself being two instances of herself.

Why this vision, as with all of hers, appears at once sharp and impressionistic is because the feat of imagination bringing it about gets accompanied and doubled by propositional thoughts about its contents. Imaginary and propositional thought are for Sartre two distinct cognitive modes involving two very different attitudes toward their content. "Imaginative consciousness," he says of the former, is a consciousness of an object *as an image*, not consciousness *of an image*.<sup>819</sup> "The image includes an act of belief" specific to and "constitutive" of it because it is the psychic evocation of something already understood to be absent; what is seen in it is so either as "non-existent," or as "absent," or as "existing

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<sup>815</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of the Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991), 134. Hereafter cited as *PIM*.

<sup>816</sup> *PIM*, 10-11.

<sup>817</sup> *PIM*, 11.

<sup>818</sup> *PIM*, 177-179.

<sup>819</sup> *PIM*, 125.

elsewhere” since it is being conjured precisely in order to compensate for its nonpresence.<sup>820</sup> Hence the thought or desire occurring in the image understands its content to be “unreal” (the presence of something in its absence is how Sartre puts it) and thus unamenable to being actually perceived or affected.<sup>821</sup> Yet quite often “I believe that I could conduct myself as if it were any sensible object whatsoever”; even though “I can do nothing with this object” that cannot in reality be seen or touched, “I believe myself capable of describing, deciphering, enumerating” and even acting on it. Such an attitude arises whenever “we form a second... reflective consciousness on top of the imaginative consciousness” and so become aware of the image that the latter by itself just is; because this consciousness takes the form of a judgment (“I am having an image”) and occurs through propositional thought, faith is placed through it in “the existence of the image” as concrete and perceptible rather than as the unreality it is. It is this application of the kind of belief peculiar to one mode of consciousness to the other, this belief in the literality of the unreal, that makes the image seem inconsistent or contradictory.

“In perception,” Sartre explains, “everything presents itself as being what it is,” in two fundamental ways. “The thing,” first of all, “occupies a rigorously defined position in time and space and [...] each of its qualities is rigorously fixed”—the principle of individuation governs it—and, second, “it cannot be itself and something else at the same time and in the same relationship,” meaning it must abide by the principle of identity.<sup>822</sup> “These two conditions,” however, “are but imperfectly fulfilled by the object of an image,” for although imagination “indeed does always envision a certain object,” *“it is extremely rare that it envisions the object as a unique appearance in an indivisible moment of time.”*<sup>823</sup> “The object of the image,” that is, *“does not obey the law of individuation*

so that the Peter who appears to me as an image is neither envisioned nor presented as the Peter whom I could perceive... the mental image is a synthesis which draws together within itself a certain duration, and often even contradictory aspects [...] For instance, my [propositional] knowledge can envision Peter as I saw him this morning while my affective [imagination] can present to me through the analogue Peter as he has been appearing to me [...] His sadness at the beginning of the week, the ill humor that made him so disagreeable yesterday, are all condensed in the... analogue, and consequently everything is presented as being the Peter of this morning [...].<sup>824</sup>

Just as *“the image does not of necessity appear as obeying the law of identity...*

Knowledge envisions a certain object; affectivity can furnish an analogue which stands for several objects: in fact, things often possess unexpected affective equivalents among themselves and the same affective content can thus supply a number of things in an undifferentiated state. This is why in a dream, *one person can be*

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<sup>820</sup> PIM, 125-126.

<sup>821</sup> PIM, 179.

<sup>822</sup> PIM, 129.

<sup>823</sup> PIM, 130.

<sup>824</sup> PIM, 131.



*several persons at once. This undifferentiated multiplicity of the image* is less apparent in the waking state...<sup>825</sup>

but is nonetheless, he continues, also in play there. (When a face, for instance, appears in the mind, it is often “contaminated” and mixed with others associated with it). Given this voiding of the principles of propositional language, whatever quasi-sensible elements or species imaginary consciousness utilizes for its conjuring work appear in it in this somewhat fused, continuous way: distinct colors blend, objects and their parts stand for or are fused with others, and moments are collapsed together. While none of this presents the least problem for this consciousness—it neither conceives these apparitions as real nor is compelled to correct their illogical format—propositional thought becomes confused from attempting to do those very things. “Reflective belief,” when it understands an image to be before it, “posits the image as a picture” substituting for something else that it should correspond to point for point, and therefore tries to resolve through description the minimal, confused contents of the image.<sup>826</sup> The persons, for instance, the image of a crowd comprises will seem countable and enumerable despite their being condensed together. The effects of this are statements that oscillate between the clarity attributed to the image and the confusion inherent to it.

Yet when propositional thought leaves the imaginary to its own devices, this Sartre basically claims, there indeed exists a form of consciousness capable of (self-) seeing from multiple spatiotemporal positions and of doing so through the trust it puts in this strange form of the image. Although the image is, to repeat it, conceived by him as being the same sort of “undifferentiated multiplicity” supposedly characteristic only of prephenomenal potential—the identity and individuation (if these are the proper terms) of what is seen are not organized like an object is (this fusional nature is even, our philosopher adds, conceived in explicitly Bergsonian terms)—*The Psychology of the Imagination* nowhere denies, as does your Deleuze, the consciousness of it the status of consciousness. “If the imaginative consciousness... were consciousness only by virtue of [being made] the object of reflection, then it would be unconscious of itself in the state of nonreflection, which is a contradiction [...]; it follows that it must possess a certain consciousness of itself.”<sup>827</sup>

And given, moreover, the impossibility of this “itself” being unitary, self-identical, or distinguished from what is otherwise thought outside it, this consciousness would indeed necessarily involve the experience of occurring along and as “two lines” or more. So no matter the myriad concrete obstacles to its emergence or the confidence and apparent self-evidence of philosophical claims about its impossibility, the other consciousness indeed can be (quite literally) seen if one looks for it and then trusts the bifurcated image that can then emerge.

“*This is why,*” our Sartre again says with us, “*one person can be several at once.*”<sup>828</sup>

## CONFUSING REAL AND IMAGINARY

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<sup>825</sup> *PIM*, 132.

<sup>826</sup> *PIM*, 125.

<sup>827</sup> *PIM*, 15.

<sup>828</sup> *PIM*, 132.

We are not, however, able to leave the detour this Sartre has taken us on and return to the other consciousness. This is because the actual, “real” Sartre hurts us as much as the other him now blended with us helps. What the former one makes absolutely clear is that the very sort of imaginative consciousness in which he can be with us only trusts such an image only insofar as it also conceives it to be an unreal instance of something absent (something, again, non-existent, fantastic, or elsewhere). If we were to see this image of him and then decide, he says, that he is in all actuality here and part of us, we would just be confusing the real with the unreal by placing faith, propositionally, in the concrete existence of the latter. Since there are two consciousnesses, “the real Sartre” repeats, there is always a difference between the actuality contended with in the one and the non-actuality created by the other; there can thus be no merging of Peter with Jean-Paul, Jane, me, or some other person he is, in actuality, not. Putting his trust in such a multiple “self”-image could never realize it (even in his head).

“Are we to believe,” the bona fide Sartre even asks in anticipation of us about such an image, “that it is truly he, in person, as a real consciousness, who is introduced into the midst of [such] imagery?”<sup>829</sup> Continuing, Sartre declares “this hypothesis [...] senseless” because this Peter “must be conscious of himself, as a real being, that is, as existing in a real world, in a real time, and marked by real memories” if he is to apprehend himself as simultaneously another. So when this happens in dreams through a sleeper appearing as himself or under the guise of someone he is not, the consciousness that (propositionally) judges has to be ceding its power to the imaginary one to the point of being temporarily eclipsed by it. “Everyone has dreamed of witnessing the adventures of an imaginary person (for instance, of [a] slave...)” he explains, “and then suddenly... perceived that it is he who is the slave.” Now “the nature of that slave is that he is in me in an unreal way,” he continues; “he is me by virtue of imagination.” So while it seems that “I am myself and another,” what is happening is rather, the “real” Sartre thinks, that “*I am invaded by the belief that what is menaced [by these events]... is unreally but absolutely myself...*

the feeling that is aroused is a feeling of belonging; in this imaginary world, in which one must be unreal if he is to enter it, an unreal me represents me, suffers, is in danger, even risks an unreal death... Once an unreal self occurs in the fascinating world of the dream the imaginary world is at once closed; it is no longer an imaginary spectacle which is before me because of the fact that I am viewing it... *it closes in on me.*<sup>830</sup>

And to the extent that this happens, the actual dreamer’s omniscient, “superior point of view” (“from which everything is seen and known,” almost in advance) is swallowed up by that of his unreal avatar so that what is imagined is so in “orientation” to or through this other-me. But that can nowise entail the complete occlusion of the real self whose real consciousness recognizes the actual real.<sup>831</sup> When thoughts (as words) concerning reality are triggered by the dream, this consciousness overrides the grip the imaginative one has on it and brings it to an end. But even if that does not happen, the dream-consciousness itself never regards its scenes as anything but unrealities, fictions, fabulations... Imagine what you

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<sup>829</sup> *PI*, 247.

<sup>830</sup> *PI*, 248-249.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*

will, the real Sartre says, but know that you will always believe in it only as something outside reality.

What the problem this real Sartre is raising comes down to is the fixedness, the solidity, characteristic of actuality and our perception of it. The real Peter cannot, for him, become conscious of himself as another person because consciousness never finally ceases to be conscious either of who it is that is actually conscious or this person's actual circumstances. There is a baseline reality of consciousness in that consciousness never ultimately loses its basis in the actual person and objects of which it is the consciousness and that in turn form the basics of actual reality from consciousness's never being lost altogether. So when instances of the other consciousness occur, "the real and the unreal do not coincide"<sup>832</sup> as "the change of attitude toward the unreal can only [...] be the weakening of the sense of the real"<sup>833</sup> since the latter cannot in anyone (barring profound brain damage) become so "blunted"<sup>834</sup> that actuality radically disappears—"even the depersonalized," he writes, "perceive correctly."<sup>835</sup> This Sartre claims that even in the extreme case of psychotic delusion and hallucination, "the patient believes in the reality of the image that occurs, in essence, as unreal" as a result of a "radical destruction of the *attitude* of consciousness *with respect* to the unreal" but not of ordinary consciousness itself.<sup>836</sup> "The schizophrenic," Sartre tells us, "is well aware the objects he surrounds himself with are unreal" because his "consciousness is [...] a victim of itself" insofar as it has "prohibited" as "taboo" disturbing thoughts that thereafter return, "reborn," as apparently involuntary hallucinations or delusions that it then again attempts to exclude; with consciousness at its origin, "the patient is perfectly aware of this vicious circle" and "does not lose... consciousness" in the ordinary sense during psychosis."<sup>837</sup> Instead, hallucination occurs outside the "actual personal consciousness" that excluded it and is afterward reflected on by the latter to create delusion; when the cycle of repression and hallucination is repeated, consciousness stops treating the latter as unreal so that "it is the patient that will confer a reality upon these apparitions" and also refute them. "I said that I was the queen of Spain," one says for Sartre, "but I knew well this was untrue."<sup>838</sup> The baseline reality of consciousness, then, may be "degraded" in psychosis, but its actuality, even there, remains. (Consciousness never entirely loses its sense of the actual.)

Now even though some of the real Sartre's assumptions will immediately solicit challenge, my purpose is not, again, to call out the old metaphysical underpinnings of your philosophers' thought (subsequent generations are already seeing through yours) but to show exactly where they, like you, cross past the other consciousness without quite seeing or arriving at it. The sense of inevitability Sartre expresses about consciousness's actuality he does almost on behalf of you: no matter how much your times have entertained (intellectually or otherwise) exotic possibilities, nearly all of you who are part of them believe, quite fundamentally, that there is an actual sense reality—that what is received by the senses is actually and not just possibly or probably real, and that what comes to you this way makes sense from really agreeing with language. So while his claim, summing up the above,

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<sup>832</sup> *PI*, 187.

<sup>833</sup> *PI*, 219.

<sup>834</sup> *PI*, 222. "Even the depersonalized perceive correctly."

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>836</sup> *PI*, 218-219.

<sup>837</sup> *PI*, 213.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*

that “the *cogito* retains its rights even among schizophrenics” would currently receive scant endorsement (the reasoning supporting it, our philosopher notes, would be identified as obviously metaphysical...<sup>839</sup>), most of you espouse similar positions in thought and action from being as bound as him by the accord, long ago reached, between signification and the object (that, again, there is a something=x is a substrate to which meanings, qua predicates, can be attached) and the effect this has on your consciousness. The same agreement we found governing even Deleuze, that is, guarantees actual objects they will be the only real ones—a substantialization similar to the one affecting person and consciousness is performed until language only yields objects—and as long as acceptance of it holds, it feeds back, too, on persons so that they stay, at all times, conscious(ness) of actuality. Sartre’s faith in actuality/consciousness is, in this sense, your own.<sup>840</sup>

This is why Sartre presumes the baseline fixedness of actuality even as he is ascribing more power to the image than most of you have ever, with it, imagined. Despite reading the unreal, nonactual and thus negative character of the image and its consciousness as *ontologically* negative—as capable, because of its refusal to recognize and be bound by actual situations, of negating them altogether and thereby effectuating changes within actuality (this is where, our philosopher says, the real Sartre is quite radical and thus not receiving from us his due...)—despite this, Sartre, like you, can hardly imagine an image of the imagination capable of entering into actuality and thereby changing its character. Whenever such an imagination crops up, it does so, for him as well as for you, only on the “fringe”<sup>841</sup> and sidelines of reality and the consciousness you have of it. Outside the actual and the rules of its game, it can never enter into and transform it.

“The actor,” real Sartre concludes by way of example, “makes use of himself, of his body, as an *analogue* of [an] imaginary person” but does not, through that, actually make this character real.<sup>842</sup> Although he “is completely caught up in, inspired by, the unreal” and must be in order to perform, “it is not the character who becomes real in the actor”<sup>843</sup>—to think that would be to “confuse the real and the imaginary”<sup>844</sup>—“but the actor who becomes unreal in his character” or personality (“the transformation... is like that we discussed in the dream”) so as to bring about a likewise “entranced consciousness” in you. When the actor resumes his real self and stops the performance, you undergo “an *actual* waking up” and the “discomfort” of finding the personages you entertained virtual “deceptions” nowhere actually found.<sup>845</sup>

## THE LIBRARY OF THE SUPERREAL

So what happens, then, to what I and our other Sartre had together said? Even if “the imaginative consciousness,” as he asserted, “must possess a certain consciousness of

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<sup>839</sup> Beyond presuming consciousness is spontaneous, Sartre’s account of why psychosis and the dream can never completely extinguish ordinary,thetic consciousness often has him resorting to implausible arguments that, when read in deconstructive fashion, evince a commitment to an autonomous, and thus autoimmune, subjectivity.

<sup>840</sup> It is also, our philosophers adds, more interesting than the current dismissal of consciousness as a metaphysical, liberal/voluntarist, or exclusively Anglo-American problem.

<sup>841</sup> *PI*, 266.

<sup>842</sup> *PI*, 277.

<sup>843</sup> *PI*, 278.

<sup>844</sup> *PI*, 274.

<sup>845</sup> *PI*, 281.

itself” that therefore cannot not, as I added, occur separately together so that, him again, “one person can be another,” is this other-consciousness not now barred again from actuality, the mere fantasy of some mystic-philosopher? Our proposition that our double images of ourselves can *actually* be real, the real Sartre claims, is itself the source of the illusion of our togetherness, and our insistence on it will just cast us back into our consciousness of actuality and its unalterable form—which language, at any rate, scarcely allows us away from. And when the image Peter may have of himself multiple returns, it only does because he has lost for a moment his wits to fascinations that cannot in the end be mistaken for actual things.

Since even our imagined version of him remains in the end distant from my problems, the other Sartre cannot be the source of our response. We have to go back, instead, to me—Seth—although this time I will of necessity show more of Jane’s face than I ordinarily do here. Remembering that instances of the other-consciousness are no longer themselves in question (consciousness, however strange or unreal, remains consciousness) along with my own insistence that according it actuality cannot be achieved through propositional assertion, we will now revisit my so far unspecified claim that acceptance or trust of the multiplied self-image is what enables it to enter reality. But this time, instead of only assessing my statements as (logical) possibilities, we will shift focus long enough to *see such an image being accepted* and how a *metamorphosis of actuality* indeed then follows.

Although the long case I make for the other-consciousness in *The Unknown Reality* indeed trails away, the instances of it I set off that way and through the text’s exercises keep proliferating. Jane’s own multiplications once again occur in synch with the production of the book but are recounted in another text, called *Psychic Politics*, that she wrote concurrently and published under her own name. It is here that we find the acceptance happening. Not long after the elementary-school reverie and the sessions our discussion here of the other-consciousness is drawn from, her attempt at some brainstorming for this book, she writes, is interrupted by another vision. “All at once,” her account goes, “the image of a library was transposed over the corner of the living room, and in it, I saw my own image.” This “*transposition*” or *superimposition of image onto actuality* continued on after this first day:

(*Day Two*) The next day as I sat at my desk... *I suddenly found myself there*, facing a floor-to-ceiling bookcase... To my left, I glimpsed a library table of light-colored wood. Far to my right was a window with a southern exposure and outside were lush green grounds, though it was autumn and the trees were bare in the world that I knew. Several times that day I found myself in the library, always in the same place...<sup>846</sup>

(*Day Three*) As we ate dinner that evening, *I saw myself for a moment sitting at a refectory-type table in the library...* *I sensed my image there.* My hair was cut in a pageboy style with straight bangs. I wore a shirt, the kind of jeans that I usually wear, but I was several pounds heavier than I am and my body moved with almost instant agility... Later, [the “actual”] I went for a walk and *the physical world seemed to be an extension of the grounds outside the library* so that *[their] realities were connected in the strangest way...* I walked

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<sup>846</sup> Jane Roberts, *Psychic Politics: An Aspect Psychology Book* (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976), 20-21. Hereafter cited as *PPL*.

around the corner and briefly visited a friend. *I felt that I was also visiting someone at the library at the same time.*<sup>847</sup>

(*Day Four*) The next morning was bright and clear, with October leaves falling everywhere. I sat down at my table in front of the bay windows to write. The pigeons were feeding on the roof, their feathers ruffled by the wind. It came in bursts, hitting the side of the house and rattling the old windows... All at once I saw myself sitting in the library, looking at an old book, only the pages were flying open and *the leaves outside the window were the sounds and the pages made in the library*. [...] For a moment, *the two experiences clicked together so smoothly that I accepted their unity without question.*<sup>848</sup>

The vision kept reiterating itself (albeit with less frequency) into the ensuing weeks and months. “I kept sensing that ‘other self in the library,’” she says on day five, “*and my consciousness would flicker back and forth so that I would be aware of her environment and mine as well.*”<sup>849</sup>

What immediately distinguishes this vision from all the others preceding it is not only its continuous, serial character but the far extent of its integration into Jane’s sense (of) reality: *what might otherwise have been a transient, virtual scene enters actuality* to the point that the latter becomes its “extension,” and the two spheres end up so “connected” that they “*click together,*” interlocked, forming a “*unity.*” Moreover, this union quite palpably—“without question”—affects actuality, since it coincides both with a torrent of inspired writing resulting in the book and with a thoroughgoing transformation of Jane’s sensory experience into something besides itself.

“The world literally changed before my eyes,” reads the account she wrote of how this happened on a drive to a store with Rob at the time. “The *transformation* was astonishing—all the more because *while everything was different, everything was also the same.*”

The physical street with the parking lot hadn’t really changed: the office supply store still sat in its place, and people walked up and down the sidewalk. On the other hand, *everything that I saw was more than itself, imbued with an extra reality almost beyond description.* [...] Each piece of paper on the walk, or blade of glass, or grocery cart glistened, stood apart with an almost miraculous separateness, *even while it was something else... besides itself.*<sup>850</sup>

In notes from this time, she dubs “*superreal*” the appearance that comes from seeing everything double—as itself and something more than itself at the same time—and then characterizes this as *the sensible coincidence of “models” and their “versions,” or potentials and actualities.*

*Words aren’t describing this at all, but people seem fantastic* in their uniqueness. No one is bland or ‘just a person’ in old terms and each person is... more solid and whole in the weirdest fashion. Each person who passes the car is *more than three-dimensional, super-real in this time but part of a ‘model’ of a greater self, one version of it that adds dimension to any given individual person*—or building, or blade of grass, or anything. This particular

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<sup>847</sup> *PP*!, 26-28.

<sup>848</sup> *PP*!, 35-36.

<sup>849</sup> *PP*!, 40.

<sup>850</sup> *PP*!, 22.

scene with parked cars and others pulling in and out is all imbued with *a greatness in itself, yet the scene exists beyond itself at the same time*. I don't know how I'm perceiving this, but I actually 'see' this extra reality over the reality we know, so everything in my view is super-real and each person's reality is obviously and clearly more [...] so super-real, each so individual yet part of the greater models of themselves which they are constantly changing.<sup>851</sup>

This sight of things being transcended while simultaneously remaining the same—as themselves with a “greater,” “extra” reality beyond them immediately on them—continues to be described as the appearing of models atop their versions, so that, recalling the entire context of Jane's and my thinking, she can be read as indicating that *she is witnessing the potentials of things (both their potential to be themselves and their other potentials) presenting themselves in an actuality that can no longer, then, be the same*. Seeing double, in other words, doubles her actuality so that it is *actually no more* from mingling with its other potentials.

Jane's account of this transfiguration of appearances obviously cannot be immediately pursued because of its complexity and her introducing “model” as a term for potential (but we will, our philosopher is confident, see that Jane not only explicitly acknowledges its Platonic connotations but also upsets them again by conceiving the model along the same *merged lines* she already has...). But having almost seen it here allows us to understand that her visions of herself as another in the library indeed involved the mutual superimposition of psychic and sensible images and thus also of potential/virtual and actual realities; you nearly now yourself see that there indeed was and therefore can be a merging of hallucination and perception *wherein actuality is stripped of its objectivity from appearing to be something besides itself even as it continues looking like itself*. What the real actually is and potentially could be end up merging—“clicking together” into a “unity”—when this is, in reality, quite simply seen.

So there is, in actuality, other-consciousness; *it is actual in an actuality that can no longer only actually be*, and Jane can thus be taken at her word when she declares it more than or beyond itself and thus, again, “*the superreal*”—or: *the superactual, the superpotential, the supervirtual*.

#### CONSENTING TO THE SUPERIMPOSITION: THE EXTENT OF THE SUPERREAL

Yet what, in that event, brings this other consciousness about, and exactly what could the acceptance (or trust) I have been gesturing to be? This part would be extremely difficult were Jane and my joint thoughts here not both lucid and on point, as “acceptance” must somehow involve consciousness assenting to its image of itself other, and doing so willfully and with words; accepting the double vision of the other consciousness, in other words, would seem to require the simpler unity of one, single consciousness and bar, therefore, the paradoxically divergent unity of the other. “You” and “I” would have to *decide* to go other such that it would be unlikely that we would ever leave baseline—the conjuncture of propositionality, objectivity, and personal consciousness that most of the time guarantees reality. There would no actuality to other-consciousness; it would just be virtual.

The difficulties heighten but then quickly subside when what Jane and I said about them is examined. Throughout her account of the library vision, Jane continues characterizing her ecstasies as states voluntarily induced (“usually when Seth is dictating a

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<sup>851</sup> *PP*, 23.

book, *I simply alter my own consciousness and let Seth go to it*<sup>852</sup>) while shifting the claim to account for how her volition is involved once her self-starting, largely automatic visions have begun. “Mixing ‘hallucinatory images’ with usual consciousness,” she writes of the library vision, “was [...] a phenomenon I’d only experimented with in isolated, brief instances”—“in the past *I wouldn’t have allowed such an experience*, or the moment it became unpleasant *I’d have cut it short*.”<sup>853</sup> The visions, that is, could always be, on her account, willed or switched off by what sounds to be the self of her ordinary consciousness. “I’ve learned,” she further says of remaining present to them, “that it’s easy to forget the details of such ‘inner sightings,’ *so I’ve trained myself to put myself ‘on hold’ at one level of consciousness while I record my experiences at another level*.”<sup>854</sup> She can also always, to recall some terminology of hers from before, remain “adjacent,” as herself, to her doubled visions.

It would seem, then, that her ordinary consciousness makes a decision to allow, from the side of it, the other consciousness once the latter has begun. But if this is indeed the case, accepting the sight of oneself double would be an entirely one-person decision that could for that reason curtail (as Jane acknowledges happened in the past) the double-image right upon enabling it. The other-consciousness’s dependence on self-consciousness to be maintained, that is, would seem to keep it from reaching the “self-other” it seems to; there would always be, kept at a distance, the person and the multiperson, the uniform and the multiform and, as a consequence, the actual real and the potential real but not their joining together, through superimposition, to make the double vision of the superreal. Consciousness, in consenting to its other form, would always stay outside it and therein prevent the latter’s actuality.

This problem is, to a certain extent, the most formidable of those so far faced because it expresses how the baseline actuality of consciousness persists, not at altogether foreclosing the other-consciousness, but at persisting as itself and thereby as separate from the latter, and also, as a result, at foiling the superimposition of the image of the other upon itself by reducing this to a juxtaposition. In the innumerable instances where Jane interrupts her visions or me, it becomes clear that there never is (as she always says) the total eclipse of her and her consciousness such that there would instead only be adjacency but not overlapping, proximity but not continuity, and distinction but no confusion. Wherever and however her visions in fact start, the distance from them her identity and capacity to decide keep her at would further prevent them from being actual, and many of the other objections previously contended with return: the visionary spectacle and its *dramatis personae* are only as real as her act, the depersonalization they entail occur only alongside personal consciousness and thus outside actuality, and the imagination’s trumping of discourse has a merely illusory efficacy. In sum, actuality appears to stay in form even when it is supposed to have assumed another form since consciousness itself never altogether loses or changes its personal form.

But how profound an obstacle is this? Although Jane’s constant decisions to alter it show that her consciousness nonetheless remains partly at baseline, *this does not in the end prevent the part of it that changes from attaining and thus transforming actuality*; things only appear otherwise because it seems the image of actuality must somehow completely fuse (as one) with the vision of its potentials if it is to be transformed, *even though the merger just described instead only comes about through their “interlocking” and “superimposition”—not their collapse*. Outside

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<sup>852</sup> *PP*!, 14.

<sup>853</sup> *PP*!, 84.

<sup>854</sup> *PP*!, 101.



both the library and the appearance to her of the surreal, Jane and the world maintain their form—she remains herself and conscious of it and “everything is the same”—and to that extent the actuality of the real is the same actuality. Yet when she and the world are instead pulled from themselves and into the library, there is an awareness of herself as something other, and “everything [is] different, while everything is the same”; there is, to that extent, a confusion of their actuality with these images that forces this actuality to stop being the same. The form actuality takes entirely depends on which of the consciousnesses is conscious of it (and vice versa) so that whenever and insofar the other-consciousness is, actuality becomes indistinguishable from the vision of it as something besides itself; *it is a question of extent—and the extent of either consciousness decides the answer*, with the other actuality actual insofar as it is, however slightly, in the psyche seen.

So the two actualities and consciousnesses can occur at once and side by side, without either form preventing this from being the case for the other. This is not, however, to say that they co-occur in the same way, and this is where the obstacle raised by decision fully subsides. When ordinary consciousness initiates the emergence of the other consciousness and then stays in form from continuing to accept the latter from the side, it determines the extent of the other *without changing the character of its form*; the one consciousness can shut the other off when the latter becomes too strong, yet this does not at all un-double its form. Other-consciousness, on the other hand, has just the opposite effect when it occurs *since it only can alter actuality’s form in overlaying it with an image of it as other*; for as long as and to the extent that this vision happens, consciousness *will and has* to see everything double (itself included), and *this will radically change actuality’s form by making it one half or side of another form*. When something appears to be itself and something different, that is, *its shape stops functioning as its form from having its lines merge and overlap with another shape become so indissociable from it that these together then equal “its” form* (“the two experiences clicked together so smoothly that I accepted their unity without question”). *Actuality, as the real in “objective” shape and thus “objective” form, transforms into a new form when its shape is blurred with that of the image until they cannot be held apart*; actuality’s form, now doubled with another (image-) form, is no longer recognizable as the real’s form and is therefore *cast* in another light.

The consequence being that when consciousness consents to being brought into this other form, this decision, instead of being what hinders the surreal, is strangely enough what brings it about.

#### STRETCHING CONSCIOUSNESS TO THE STICKING POINT

“Jane has allowed,” my characterization of her decision thus justifiably runs, “a portion of her this-life consciousness to go off on a tangent, on another path, into *another system of actuality*.”<sup>855</sup>

“She has had many experiences in which she glimpsed momentarily the rich otherness within physical reality. She has [also] known heightened perceptions of a unique nature. Never before, however, has she stepped firmly, while awake, into another level of reality, where she allowed herself to sense firmly the connection between worlds.”<sup>856</sup>

“In the waking state,” I reiterate, “Jane is able to alter the direction of her focus enough to bring about a condition in which *she perceives two realities simultaneously*. She is just

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<sup>855</sup> *PP*!, 31.

<sup>856</sup> *PP*!, 33.

beginning, so as yet she is only occasionally aware of this other experience. She is, however, aware of it now in the back of her mind more or less constantly. It does not intrude upon the world she knows, but *enriches* it.”<sup>857</sup>

“This brings the two existences together,” I explain, “so that they *coincide*. *They are held*, however, *both separately and in joint focus*.”<sup>858</sup>

What happens, Jane clarifies, is that when she allows her sight of “the rich otherness” to float over the contents of ordinary vision, the two images quickly become indistinguishable: her “consciousness would flicker back and forth” between them until they would be, again, “connected” and “clicked together”—a “unity.” As she put it right after her comment about “mixing ‘hallucinatory images’ with usual consciousness” in the visions: during them, “*my own awareness zipped back and forth so quickly* at times that afterward I had trouble remembering who or what I was”<sup>859</sup>

Consciousness’s oscillating or fluctuating between its forms is what grants her, somehow, “the entirely different perspective” in which actuality and image assume their overlapping unity; where “the world appears different [...], more real than usual, more solid and better constructed”—or, again, “superreal”<sup>860</sup> (as if “I’d been fitted with a spectacular new pair of glasses”<sup>861</sup>).

This oscillation, however, raises some last questions about the actuality of this superreal, as it indicates a problem left conspicuously untreated in our account of consciousness. The fact Jane once again describes herself fluctuating between images of herself (her descriptions of this have been so frequent, our scholars note, that repeating them is unnecessary...) makes it sound like she is shifting between two modes of consciousness and not, instead, experiencing the simultaneous occurrence of them needed for actuality to double into another form of reality. So even if this vacillation of consciousness could somehow create the effect of a convergence close enough to lead to her characterization of actuality as “more solid”—“built better,” she even says, “and with much great depth”<sup>862</sup>—it nonetheless would not involve the co-occurrence of the superimposition. Jane’s transformation of consciousness would in that case only be a shift between its modes, and the realization of a different actuality, then, an illusion or visual effect not binding.

Of all the objections dealt with so far, this one is the most important because it points right at some questions that have not yet been addressed: is other-consciousness simply imaginative consciousness, and if not, what yields the co-occurrence of ordinary and imaginative consciousness, and are the claims about their convergence and unity really warranted? Our recent characterizations of the other, transformed actuality as the doubling and interlocking of objective things with psychic images obviously implies that ordinary and imaginary consciousness operate in tandem and as the other-consciousness to effectuate this (so we obviously have not intended to treat it as synonymous with imaginative consciousness). Yet on the other hand, our account of how Jane’s visions give actuality its other form allowed ordinary consciousness to remain to some extent outside them, which suggests, on the contrary, that the two modes of consciousness remain disunited and altogether distinct and that fluctuating between them would be the only means of “joining”

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<sup>857</sup> *PPI*, 31.

<sup>858</sup> *PPI*, 31-32.

<sup>859</sup> *PPI*, 103.

<sup>860</sup> *PPI*, 22.

<sup>861</sup> *PPI*, 22-23.

<sup>862</sup> *PPI*, 24.

them. The imagination, in that event, would turn out to be the only “other” consciousness, and the deepening of actuality a ruse.

Since Jane and I are consistent in our claims that other-consciousness is a convergence of divergent modes of consciousness and the real, the problem lies not in our thinking but in something that was left unsaid in its philosophical extension here; this is to say that unless our account of how double vision makes the superreal in no way defines what took place for Jane (and our philosopher and anthropologist find that possibility absurd...), the event of a coincidence of image and object will have to be granted us, and the question then concerns how this would be possible, according to the terms laid down here, if the respective consciousnesses of them can remain at the same time and to some degree separate. The question, again, is one of extent, but this time it concerns the potential contradiction that results from claiming that the convergence is of an only limited extent: if the coincidence between the consciousnesses is not full, then how can it indeed “be,” and through just what means?

Our answer will at first lie in my apparently simple statements (from above) that Jane allowed, during the library visions, “a portion of her [...] consciousness to go” or “step into”—“enter,” I even later say—the other actuality. Although this seems not to be a manifestly conceptual claim, the repetition of this language of movement in an immediately subsequent passage points to the beginnings of a concept. Speaking again of *The Unknown Reality*, I reiterate to Jane that it

will *expand* the consciousness of each of its readers, and the book itself is presented in such a manner that *it automatically pulls your awareness out of its usual grooves, so that it bounces back and forth* between the standardized version of the world you accept, and the unofficial versions [...]. As Jane delivers this material, the same things happens so that in some respects she has been *snapping back and forth* [...], practicing with *the elasticity of consciousness*, and in this book more than in previous ones, her consciousness has been sent out further, so to speak. The delivery of the material itself has helped her to develop the necessary *flexibility* [...].<sup>863</sup>

And I even draw the link between the movement and pulling of consciousness to the emergence of other-consciousness and the other actuality: the latter “can only be achieved when you are able to *leave behind you* many of the ‘facts’ that you have accepted as criteria of experience”—“*then* you will be able to look at existence with new eyes.”<sup>864</sup> Consciousness, in other terms, must to some degree exit actuality in order to experience the new form of it, and must also in turn first stretch past its bounds if this is to occur.

This elasticity is the key. Since the persistence of a divide between the ordinary, personal form of consciousness and that of the imagination would seem to prohibit the union of them at work in Jane’s visions, the former would have to stretch into the latter and become stuck to and embedded in it for Jane’s visions even to take place. Our constant insistence that “consciousness is not stationary, but ever-moving”<sup>865</sup> turns out to contain the seeds of the solution: personal consciousness is capable of being stretched out of form and into the space of imagination so that it blends with and becomes at a certain point

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<sup>863</sup> *PP*!, 31.

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>865</sup> *PP*!, 33.

indistinguishable from the latter, and *it is at and through that point that the convergence occurs*. Once it has been “pulled from its grooves,” the elasticity of ordinary consciousness enables it to be drawn into the imaginary and then *stuck to it; this sticking point is where the two consciousnesses and their respective forms join and what makes their union binding. It is where consciousness reaches its sticking point in imagination that they converge*.

Jane’s experience of oscillating between these two poles, then, indicates not the impossibility of the union but its incompleteness: the part of personal consciousness that has been pulled into but not directly or entirely conjoined to the imagination finds itself stretched between the place where it sticks to the latter and its own, normal position; it attempts to view from its own perspective what it sees in the imagination even as it is being drawn toward assuming another point of view, and getting almost torn apart by these contradictory perspectives creates the experience of swinging or snapping back and forth between them—the disorientation of not being able to tell who or where one is. Stretched past its borders but not entirely out of form, some portion of consciousness (the part not “to the side” or “on hold”) finds itself inside the imagination even as it is unable to maintain its consciousness of this, and the divergence is experienced as a lapsing in and out of ordinary awareness. Short of its point of fusion with imagination, stretched consciousness repeatedly vacillates.

This oscillation, however, is not indicative of the failure or limit of the other consciousness, and the sticking point not where it begins taking effect. Personal consciousness’s fluctuation is the experience of the divide between itself and the imagination it has nonetheless been drawn into—a divergence that is, again, as much a part of other-consciousness as the convergence of their different forms. In not meeting, these forms (of what actually is and of what could otherwise be) end up maintained, and this is precisely what enables them to remain separate while joined, and other-consciousness a consciousness of the coincidence of possibilities simultaneously distinct.

Elasticity, though, is also what allows personal consciousness to be at the same time directly pressed, like something adhesive, onto the surface of imagination and sealed together with it; since ordinary thought becomes indissociable from images at this contact point, the two are experienced simultaneously and as entirely the same so that they end up being mutually reinforcing in their tension and pulling apart. This adherence yields the coherence of Jane’s vision of the merger of two sides of the real long thought destined to remain completely apart, and thus the novel, surplus “actuality” of this synthesis of potential and actual in the form of another person.

Binding the two consciousness into another consciousness makes binding the reality of the superreal.

#### HALLUCINATORY SOLIDITY

The tripartite scheme of consciousness and other-consciousness—part of personal consciousness in place, another portion of it stretched into but not joined to imagination, and a part fused with imagination—is made continually evident in the lucidity and apparent solidity of Jane’s otherwise “hallucinatory” visions.

“I looked at the wall where the library visions usually appeared,” Jane recounts of one night from that period, “wondering if my double image might be there.

Instantly, I saw my double in the library. Then spirals of energy, silver-colored, suddenly surrounded her. There was a lurching in my stomach as the energy moved,

circling my double's image until finally she disappeared and the spiraling energy took her place.<sup>866</sup>

Some portion of her self-consciousness next consents to the experience proceeding, and then remains to the side/in place while another part of it stretches into and even reaches the scene of this imagination.

I could feel myself drawn into the energy too; and for a moment at my table I felt uneasy. I conquered my momentary cowardice just as the energy began moving at an incredible speed. Then I was inside it—or I was whatever it was. It moved to the library window; then was instantly outside.<sup>867</sup>

The part of her ordinary consciousness adhered to imaginary consciousness (“I was whatever it was”) then experiences itself at once as itself and what appears in the image...

Everything was giant-sized, as if I was looking through binoculars. ‘I’ was walking up giant stalks. At first I didn’t know what they were or what I was, for that matter. The stalks were as tall as redwood trees, and suddenly ‘I’ realized that I was an insect of some kind. This was a grass blade. I thought I was a fly in a gigantic forest—a giant fly, because everything was so large and so surreal, and I’m used to thinking of flies as small. But I was an ordinary fly, I realized, and this was what the world looked like! [...] It’s impossible to verbalize the sensations I had, *but I remember being aware of the weight of my wings. They seemed very sturdy and reassuring.*<sup>868</sup>

... and the evanescence of the vision is for that reason conversely endowed with the solidity belonging to actuality. The connection fails, however, when the part of self-consciousness not conjoined to the imaginary but underneath its overlay is overpowered by the vision and snaps back into place.

By now I was rather proud of myself for coming to terms with these new conditions, and I decided I might as well explore the environment as the fly. I flew off the grass blade, but this act brought about another flurry of confusion. I flew into the library again, out of it into my physical living room, and then out through the bay windows into the air [...]. I lost all sense of having any kind of form, and I can’t remember what else happened. I have a dim memory of flying bodiless ‘somewhere.’ The next thing I knew I was back with my body at the table.<sup>869</sup>

So that other-consciousness is once more scaled back by consciousness, but not before endowing actual reality with an image of it being more than itself—and actuality adding its “sturdiness” to this surreal.

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<sup>866</sup> *PP*, 62.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>869</sup> *PP*, 62.

## CONCLUSION

“The multiperson,” “other-consciousness,” “the super-real”.... Jane’s terms, claims, thoughts—concepts—turn out, once they have been read and understood, to be not only viable but so sound that they can be explicated with precision. More work, obviously, is required if her other consciousness is to be more fully realized as a concept: what consciousness as a basic phenomenon is in the first place becomes unclear if it is neither entirely representational nor the property of a unitary, basically single subject. Only after that work has been done will the stakes of the “supra-reality” of another consciousness for a post-religious theory of “religion” become evident, just as is the case with the ethical possibilities implied by it (the other is awake and present in oneself in this consciousness... but without being appropriated or annulled as other). In the revision of this dissertation, I intend to address these issues.

For now, however, I want to address some questions that concern the legitimacy of my endeavor here. Can inventive, thoughtful explication—of thoughts, concepts, and the texts containing them—really yield concepts capable of recasting and transforming such an apparently bedrock understanding of the real as the concept of the self? Do fundamental concepts indeed exist and somehow hold together, whether skeletally or as diffuse threadwork, basic human conditions and basic elements of the real? And who would have the capacity or right to think through and change such big concepts?

Readers who love theory—“philosophical amateurs,” professionals or not—will likely be surprised to encounter questions that cast so much doubt on its possibility and legitimacy. Anthropologists, however, will not. What I have been aiming at in this dissertation is a mode of thinking that has been said to have little place in anthropology in one of the most incisive recent attempts to rethink what makes the discipline distinctive as an intellectual project. Given the importance of this approach at Berkeley and my choice not to follow it (despite the proximity of my questions to some of its concerns), I believe it necessary to justify myself in relation to it here. The following discussion, then, is offered first of all for that purpose but also in order to show some of the limitations of this approach.

“The anthropology of the contemporary” as Paul Rabinow has conceived it employs certain methods traditional to sociocultural anthropology—first-person “immersion” in events, dialogue with informants (who in this case are “technicians of general ideas”), narrative accounts of these interactions—for a purpose that is not traditional to past or present anthropologies. Instead of aiming to understand general, predefined institutions through their local instantiations, this anthropology seeks to examine how novel phenomena cause problems to emerge in which neither the nature of these institutions nor the relations between them remain the same. The now-famous paradigmatic case of “*French DNA*” is the threat different groups in France saw the mapping of the human genome posing to human “dignity”: once genetic material, Rabinow shows, was seen as being extricable from the body and the body thus not being synecdochal with the person, these categories and a series of others—the human, life, the sacred, the nation—were thrown into question in an unprecedented fashion in French public discourse. The stakes, for Rabinow, of tracking such events are double. The current efficacy of technoscience, first of all, undoes even recent understandings of such self-evident concepts at such a rapid, incessant pace that the humanities and social sciences may literally no longer be addressing existent realities when employing them. An anthropology that understands what the realities corresponding to such concepts are becoming can redefine these concepts so that they are once again meaningful.

Second, accepting that history in fact works this way entails that “one has no right to despise the present” because “one has no place from which to despise it”<sup>870</sup> (“the real has no outside, but only margins”<sup>871</sup>) and that one can only seek to understand and change it in an immanent fashion. In both regards, Rabinow’s mode of anthropology is extremely innovative for showing how thinking can occur amidst instability and chaos so extreme that basic categories are rendered obsolete.

Now although its “object” could seem to make my research an instance of such the anthropology of the contemporary, my attempt to understand Jane’s work in terms as conceptual, general, and thus (supra-) metaphysical as her own puts it well outside this rubric, intellectual orientation, and methodological approach. Whatever the anthropology of the contemporary might owe to the general, extra-disciplinary thinking still associated with and undertaken as philosophy, it is explicitly articulated against the grand ambitions and (supposedly) resultant delusions of the theoretician. “Events” like Jane may indeed, as Rabinow puts it, “problematize classifications, practices, things” (“the taken for granted can change” and “new entities appear”) and the frequency with which such genuine events occur renders the real extremely “contingent, malleable, and open.”<sup>872</sup> Anyone cognizant of this, moreover, will enunciate “concepts” that will be similarly “capable of making something new happen in a field of knowledge” by recasting how taken-for-granted matters are understood.<sup>873</sup> Such concepts, however, are far different than what concepts were and still are for the philosophers with whom I have been in both implicit and explicit dialogue here. Given the density of events in it, “the present is a good time to desist from employing totalizing categories like epoch, civilization, culture”<sup>874</sup> or “being” and “logic.”<sup>875</sup> Such “notions are in conceptual ruin” because they treat the event as “the empirical form of the system” and thus “fail to do justice” to its anomalous status in relation to general historical drift.<sup>876</sup> Concepts of local and limited extension would be most effective, this line of reasoning goes, at showing the event’s singularity because they would not attempt to make it exemplary of some other generality.

The concepts, then, that I am presently developing through my encounter with Jane’s work—concepts of consciousness, of the relation between discursive thought and imagination, of actuality and potentiality, of time, and of a plural psyche—would remain for Rabinow “theoretical”: too based in “hermeneutic” and “systematic” questioning, and too concerned with the “encompassing fields” and “epochs” that my presuming a basic, dominant form of the self would imply.<sup>877</sup> In this regard, my concepts not only would fail “to make something new happen in a field of knowledge” by not bearing more precisely on a specific field of it but would also for that reason miss out on the irrelevance, today, of theory. “We are arguably in a post-philosophic age,”<sup>878</sup> Rabinow says, because theoretico-philosophical “claims to [...] generality” or universality—“attempts to define what ‘thinking’

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<sup>870</sup> Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14. Hereafter cited as *FM*.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>872</sup> Paul Rabinow, *French DNA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). 181. Hereafter cited as *FD*.

<sup>873</sup> *FD*, 182.

<sup>874</sup> *FD*, 181.

<sup>875</sup> See below for this citation.

<sup>876</sup> *FD*, 181.

<sup>877</sup> *FD*, 175.

<sup>878</sup> *FM*, 16.

or the ‘problem’ ‘really is’—“are themselves fated to fail,” “will not establish themselves as enduring solutions,” because heterogeneity is the basic character of human reality.<sup>879</sup>

More precisely, the trouble with theory for Rabinow is that it transposes questions and methods anterior to modernity into the modern situation of social differentiation and fragmentation, where the incommensurability between basic human institutions (Weber’s “value-spheres”) means no single set of questions can bear on them as a whole. “To the question,” he states, “of why the practitioners of modern reason have proliferated totalizing systems, especially philosophies of history, and why these systems have failed, Hans Blumenberg provides” the following response:

He locates the problem in a historical fact: ‘Modern reason, in the form of philosophy, accepted the challenge of the questions, both the great and all to great, that were bequeathed to it’ [...] by the great systems of Christian theology. [...] [T]here had been a proportionality of scale between the type of questions posed and the type of answers provided. The proportionality between problem and response broke down in the seventeenth century. Yet the former questions (*about the nature of being, of logic, of general principles of the cosmos*) continued to be posed and, more importantly, accepted as legitimate, that is, as requiring answers. Blumenberg’s diagnosis is that *modern thinkers ‘found it impossible to decline to answer questions about the totality of history [qua the secularized equivalent of the whole of being or the cosmos]. To that extent the philosophy of history is an attempt to answer a medieval questions with the means available to a post medieval age.’ The wrong tools for the wrong job.*<sup>880</sup>

The stuff of theoretical philosophy—“being,” “logic,” “general principles”—is unsuited, that is, to thought and criticism once the real’s lack of a unitary foundation and character has been grasped. Even avowedly post-philosophical social and political theory will, according to this view, have to recognize that “the form(s) anthropos is currently being given” emerge, in fact, only from a multiplicity of sites and thus in a purely “fragmented,” “sectorial” fashion such that they cannot be critically understood (let alone transformed) through general concepts.<sup>881</sup>

Yet are both the real and thought really so heterogeneous as not to admit of a basic uniformity or structure and therefore a kind of thinking that can understand them at that level of generality? And isn’t “philosophy,” especially when in its (new, anti-, post-, and supra-) metaphysical mode(s), that very sort of thinking? Whatever Rabinow’s confidence about the limits of big, molar concepts for thinking the real, it seems to me quite doubtful that capitalism, technology, law, biology... or the subject are not sufficiently general as phenomena to allow for general thoughts about them and their interrelations. But since this point is not controversial, perhaps the more important question is whether approaching such general phenomena without general elements of thought—“being,” “logic,” “general principles”—is even viable. Even if the job is the right one, would they really still be “the wrong tools” for it?

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<sup>879</sup> AT, 4-5.

<sup>880</sup> AT, 29. My emphasis.

<sup>881</sup> Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 14.



Although Rabinow by no means claims to be entirely faithful to Foucault in his proposals for anthropology, he nonetheless furthers with them a series of the latter's projects, including "historical ontology." The immediate problem this raises is that Foucault's use of the term is by no means innocent of a "medieval" and ostensibly contra- or faux- modern sense that he would supposedly be distant from (and to some extent claims to be). However much this ontology is not "pure" speculative thinking and concerned with specific, concrete questions, it is also, as Foucault very clearly states in "What is Enlightenment?" (a text I believe Rabinow otherwise interprets in a faithful and profound way), a project that has its "homogeneity," "systematicity," and "generality." In short, historical ontology concerns a "homogenous domain," which is "the forms of rationality" or "technology" that organize practices; it examines, furthermore, how such practices forms "systems" in that they concern in all cases "relations of control over things," "relations of action upon others," and "relations with oneself" (i.e., the subject in its relation to science, power, and ethics); and, last, it takes up these practical systems in their generality, which is that they contend with recurrent problems such as law, health, and madness.<sup>882</sup> The fact Foucault states this certainly separates him from the position, as he puts it, that "no work can be done except in disorder and contingency."<sup>883</sup>

But this alone does not entail that Foucault's work concerns being and thought as such. What does, however, indicate this possibility is the fact that the general object of his ontology is rationality—and therefore also truth. Here is where, I would argue, Foucault reveals his debt to Heidegger ("my entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger"), which is to conceive history as the history of thought concerned with truth and governed by a certain understanding of it (history as the history of what Rabinow calls "serious speech acts"). While Foucault is certainly not undertaking the history of being in Heidegger's sense, he nevertheless presumes that the conception of truth as correctness and adequation that Heidegger sees as first emerging with Plato and then functioning as a basic assumption of metaphysical discourse is also a basic trait and condition of scientific knowledge and rationality; he would also likely agree with Heidegger that a series of concepts—of essence, God, and man—only become possible on the basis of it.<sup>884</sup> To the extent that even Foucault accepts (perhaps must) that rational knowledge is possible only under the general condition of the basic, metaphysical notion of truth-as-correctness, then he also would have to admit that the very terms said to divide "theory" from anthropology—once again, "being," "logic," and "general principles"—allow traits of that basic metaphysical concept and those that depend on it to become legible, criticized, and changeable. In a word, the ontology in historical ontology necessarily entails the possibility of thinking about thinking and being (or the real) in their generality. "Theory" is certainly not sufficient or without problems, but it remains the sort of thinking most capable of that task.

My intention is not to vindicate French philosophy as it was practiced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or to privilege theory and concepts over all other kinds of thinking.

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<sup>882</sup> Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: Essential Works of Michel Foucault, Vol 1*. (New York: The New Press, 1997). 317-318.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid.

<sup>884</sup> On this point, see both the famous text Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," in *Pathmarks* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 155-182 and Catherine Malabou's commentary on it in Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2011).

(And it is certainly not to demand a return to Heidegger on his own terms.) Rather, it is to suggest, first, that the “form(s) anthropos is being given today” are unlikely not to conform to basic material and conceptual forms—the form of the subject included—of a metaphysical character (i.e., from my perspective, unities not genuinely transformable and thus not both single and plural, actual and potential, and in two presents at once). Second, my point is that any attempt to articulate concepts that diverge from and thus surpass these forms will have to address the latter at their most basic level. Otherwise, one is simply at risk of being recontained and reappropriated by them.

No doubt I could be told that this second aim is already possible, albeit in a more partial fashion, through the anthropology of the contemporary. One goal of the latter, Rabinow writes, is “to achieve a *modal change* from seeing a situation not only as ‘a given’ but as ‘a question.’

Such a modal shift seeks to accomplish a number of things. It asserts that in any historically troubled situation, not only are there multiple constraints at work but multiple resources as well. Foucault underscores this condition of heterogeneous, if constrained, contingency [...] in order to propose a particular style of inquiry [involving] the ‘freeing up’ of possibilities. *The act of thinking is an act of modal transformation from the constative to the subjunctive. From the singular to the multiple. From the necessary to the contingent.*<sup>885</sup>

Even if the situation of the subject and the person cannot be apprehended from the outside as such or in its essence, the argument would go, the variants of the dominant form—“one body, one self,” as I put it in the introduction to this work—can be seen as contingent, and other possibilities postulated and considered. The singular would become in this way plural, only one of several possibilities.

But why assume, I would like to answer, that a “modal change” involves thinking in terms of possibilities instead of a change of the modal itself? Why not attempt to transform the very modal categories by which realities are conceived as actual and possible in the first place? Why not attempt to envision the real according to a form that would to some extent strip actualities of their actuality and introduce “pure” possibilities right into the “actual”? Responses will not in this case be forthcoming precisely because the jettisoning of “being,” “logic,” “general principles,” and “theory” from distinctly anthropological inquiry—“thinking about how to relate to the issue of anthropos [...] presents different types of challenges to philosophical thinkers” than “to the anthropologist”<sup>886</sup>—requires the anthropologist to presume that all “possible” modalities are already fixed (i.e., “given”) and thus to remain almost as subordinate as most other scientists to a tacit, perhaps standard metaphysics. The actuality of a concrete situation can thus be considered contingent and open to novel possibilities but not called into question as being “in fact” actual. Other presents or futures likewise remain merely potential or virtual, and in some cases simply impossible. Strangely enough, even if it is based in imagination, the other consciousness I have sought to develop in these pages goes much further by superimposing the potential over the actual so that another modality of the real—the supra-actual/supra-potential—can emerge. That is, shifting into another consciousness transforms actualities in a direct and

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<sup>885</sup> *AT*, 19.

<sup>886</sup> *AT*, 14.

immediate way. In this, “other-consciousness” would not only seem to account for something fundamental about thought but to do so only by taking up thought as thought and thus at the (prohibited) level of its generality.

Yet even if this case for an anthropology of concepts were granted me, a last charge could nonetheless be raised against its results here. “Other-consciousness,” as a product of imagination, would be “too mental”—a matter of analysis, as Rabinow says of “imaginaries,” too “confined to the mental lives of particular actors” from the outset to yield concepts capable of illumining concrete “vectors of power,” “force lines,” and institutional realities.<sup>887</sup> Viewing such actualities from its perspective might indeed allow a “fringe” of possibilities to emerge around and somehow merge with them. But what could it really allow one to understand about actualities in their specificity and concreteness?

If anything is actual today it is the uniform, homogenous condition of planetary modernity (of transnational capitalism, the hyperautonomous subject, liberal political order, and technoscience) and the metaphysics of the rationality that holds it together. No doubt modernity is a condition of “constant change” and “malleability” wherein new beings and forms incessantly emerge. But at the same time, these forms can be trusted to conform to the (political-economic, personological, political, and scientific) form(s) rendering them intelligible, and their transformations are thus interior to this form. Catherine Malabou has characterized this condition as one in which human beings become “creatures who no longer have time ahead of themselves, who live out a teleology that is shattered because already accomplished.”<sup>888</sup> Whatever alienation they face and pass through can only result in novelty... and the inevitability of novelty condemns them to a suffocating world of prefigured possibilities. “Such a future,” she continues, “is both beautiful and terrible.

Beautiful, *because everything can still happen*; terrible, because *everything has already happened*. This situation creates the contradictory couple of saturation and vacancy. Saturation to the extent that the future can, in our time, no longer represent the promise of far-off worlds [...]. The philosophical tradition, reaching its completion, has as its double *the exhaustion of the outside world. The ‘new world order’ means the impossibility of any exotic, isolated, or geopolitically marginal event. Paradoxically, this saturation of theoretical and natural space is felt as a vacuum [...] where we must acknowledge that there is nothing more to do. The most sterile aspect of the future lies in the unemployment, both economic and metaphysical, it promises.*<sup>889</sup>

This condition is indeed so “actual”—“real,” “concrete,” “the present”—and the world consequently so enclosed that gaining critical distance from it through humanistic inquiry has become extremely difficult. It is even uncertain that the potent and apparently revolutionary challenges to it being made by people and through modes of thought exterior to the regnant form(s) can render themselves effectively actual or whether they are beginning to amount to mere virtual possibilities not entirely within reality. Whatever might still be outside or alien to Occidental form(s) stands at risk of oblivion, and this form risks never again encountering transformation or its future.

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<sup>887</sup> Paul Rabinow and George E. Marcus, *Designs for An Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 76-77.

<sup>888</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 192. Hereafter cited as *FH*.

<sup>889</sup> *FH*, 192.

In such circumstances, being able to see superimposed over the “actual” world the other versions of itself that are “actually” its others—to think and envision, simultaneously, the planet as itself and the alien worlds still remaining at its (now internal) margins, to think it a double image, to think it “superreal”—might itself be a first means, however “mental,” of casting it into an entirely new form. The “polyform” of what would then be our (collective) other psyche, with anthropological writing, remembering itself as an intellectual vocation from the other, offering to thought a first, imaginative glimpse and then full vision of it.

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## APPENDIX: A PROPOSAL FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following research proposal was submitted in March 2011 to the Fondation Fyssen (Paris) as an application for a postdoctoral research fellowship in anthropology. It is included here as-is at the request of my dissertation committee chair and in order to show the bearing my dissertation has on forms of anthropological research more normative than the one I have undertaken in the main text. The proposal concerns, broadly, how “other-consciousness” (which I here call plural consciousness) might be operant among New Age spirit mediums called “channels,” and how psychological trauma might bring about conditions of pathological dissociation that this consciousness resolves.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on “channeling” proper is scarce. The main worthwhile texts are an annotated bibliography of channeled manuscripts (Bjorling 1992), a monograph examining the contradiction between channeling’s roots in American individualism and its communitarian political message (Brown 1999), and an article describing the particular kind of trance state it involves (Hughes 1991), which evinces features of both possession trance and shamanic trance. Because Brown mostly ignores the rather large group of channels whom articulate prophetic discourses highly critical of U.S. capitalism, imperialism, and ecological politics, he fails to see that channels often understand their possession experiences to point to the limits of individualism and Occidental forms of personhood and self. My work has therefore been an attempt to provide a more thorough ethnographic account both of channeling as such and of its status as a site generative of political critique and vernacular “philosophical” thinking concerning the self. Hughes’ article gives a very accurate description of the nature of trances in channeling but it does not at all seize upon these larger implications of channels’ descriptions of their trances.

The literature on spirit possession in U.S. anthropology does, however, address the political and conceptual consequences of the phenomenon in other historical and social contexts. Older works on possession by Boddy (1989) and Lambek (1981) still illumine, albeit in a culturalist fashion, the ways in which trance is a means of expressing social and political contradictions that cannot otherwise be directly avowed. The most perspicuous research, though, has come in the last decade from Morris, on Thai mediumship (2000), and in Raphael Sánchez’s work on Pentecostalism in Venezuela (2008). The deconstructive orientation of both authors enables them to show that the peculiar subjectivity of mediums provides them a basis for making precise criticisms of the forms of self, historical memory, and politics that were adopted in these contexts under colonialism and after decolonization. At the same time, however, both authors focus so much on the aporetic and paradoxical dimension of this subjectivity that they are unable to account for any of the more generative ideas about the self they both hint that mediums articulate in their respective contexts.

The limitations of the contemporary literature on possession has led me to look to adjacent subfields for a theoretical framework more appropriate to understanding the subjectivity of channels. The first of these is the current scholarship on personhood in West Africa and Melanesia, which contends with forms of the person that are plural, in the sense that they extend between individual human beings and/or involve attributing multiple persons to one individual (see, for instance, Lambek and Strathern 1998; Piot 1999). The most important text here is Marilyn Strathern’s *The Gender of the Gift*, since it provides a

precise account of how such “di-vidual” (vs. individual) concepts of the person are socially conceivable for those who live and espouse them. A second body of theory is to be found in the older psychological anthropology of possession and trance (chiefly Bourguignon 1968 and 1976). Although its neglect of certain issues of postcolonial politics causes it to risk treating possession as an ahistorical phenomenon, its broad overview of how possession trance is, across cultural contexts, a state of *dissociation*—that is, one involving a sense of possession by an alien force and a loss of consciousness and volition—has allowed me to understand how the trances of channels differ in those ways I emphasize below. Third, Severi’s recent theorizations (Severi 2002 and 2004) of the nature of the subjectivity operant in shamanic discourse and ritual speech more broadly greatly clarifies how a plural subject is produced through the use of language in trance (see below).

#### RESEARCH CONDUCTED THUS FAR/GAINS OF THIS RESEARCH

My dissertation focuses on the trance states of “channels”—contemporary American (U.S.) spirit mediums that voice messages from spirits, gods, and extraterrestrials—and their implications for theories of the subject and consciousness. Must consciousness always be conceived either as the property of a subject or else (following both deconstructive and recent analytic philosophy, from Jacques Derrida to John Searle) as a mere artifact of our ascription of a personal substrate (or *subjectum*) to thought and action? Doesn’t a certain popular understanding of “consciousness” as that which is achieved in nonordinary experiences suggest, instead, that it can entail precisely the absence of a subject in the traditional sense? My fieldwork, conducted intensively for one-and-a-half years and intermittently for five years before that, has led me to argue that certain states of consciousness do not even involve an illusion of unimpeded apperception since the self is doubled or multiplied within them. The vernacular “psychologies” of channels, I have also realized, are unique in allowing this fact to be understood.

In channeling, the 1970’s and 1980’s saw the first resurgence of mediumship in the United States following the decline of the Spiritualist form of possession that flourished in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-C. This time, however, the voices speaking were not those of dead people but of gods, spiritual intelligences, and even extraterrestrials. Their messages were not conciliatory or entirely religious but attempts to push human beings to undertake a social and ethical “evolution” that would require a transformation of their basic form and experience of the self. The self, the channeled spirits claimed, would have to go from being a unity to a plurality whose form is best exemplified by the state of the possessed medium. Given the context in which channeling takes place—channels and their audiences are highly literate, middle to upper middle class people living in a highly rationalized (in the Weberian sense), late capitalist society—the concepts of the self offered by channels are often precise enough to be put into direct dialogue with philosophical understandings of the self. When channels say, for instance, that “the psyche is multiple” and “the self can potentially maintain two lines of consciousness at once” they are questioning the very unity, singleness, and presence whose ascription to the self philosophers such as Derrida and Deleuze contested. But channels also take the additional step of stating that plurality and dissociation are also the essence of the self.

The philosophical import of channels’ ideas first becomes evident, as I argue in my dissertation, through an examination of their use of language while in their trances. Beyond simply referring to themselves by the names of their other, trance personas (“Seth,” “the Pleiadians,” “the Owls,” etc.), channels also refer to their ordinary self in the third person—

both through a pronoun (“she”) or as a person relative to the spirits: “the channel,” “our vehicle,” “our human counterpart,” or even “this self that, in your terms, we once were” (which is to say, in the last case, that the channeled persona is claiming to be the “reincarnational future” of the channel herself). This splitting and doubling of self-reference functions, much like Severi shows shamanistic discourse does, to establish such a strong parallelism between the channel and the channeled spirit that the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation are not only dissociated from each other but at the same time paradoxically fused, which results in a “pluralized enunciator.” This causes a “paradoxical identity” to emerge of which, as Severi emphasizes, contradictory predicates are affirmed. Now given that this plural identity is in fact socially recognized in the contexts channels operate in, the recent philosophical presumption that the ascription of contradictory predicates to the same self or person is incompatible with subjectivity (in both the grammatical and philosophical senses) (Deleuze 1994; Derrida 1999) need no longer be accepted. This very practice of the pluralization of enunciation prevents things from being so simple, which in turn requires surpassing received ideas here.

But how? The channels, who themselves grapple with this question, respond that the pluralization that occurs in their trances does not involve the complete occlusion of consciousness but rather the emergence of a state of it in which it is not the ‘I’ that always accompanies representation but two or more selves or foci of awareness—and thus a subject (of thought, desire, and will) that is multiple. No doubt the polyvalence of the term consciousness and the difficulties involved in ascribing it to intentional states requires taking serious precautions about adopting indigenous categories and references here. Yet to ignore channels’ descriptions of their cognitive states would risk overlooking both the consistency I found them to have in the course of my research and the fact that doubleness and plurality is, as has been repeatedly shown by sociocultural anthropologists, a characteristic feature of possession states. Given, though, that their use of language establishes a plural identity that it may not be possible to experience, channels’ claims here would be correct only if they could indicate a mode (or “substance”) of cognition in which they achieve a corresponding sense of self. Channels in fact provide one in their accounts of the images that appear “to them” during their trances and the dreams and visions they pursue as part of their spiritual practices. What the channel often sees in these is an image of another person (or of a god, or an animal, or a spirit) that is experienced as an image of herself. The subject of this experience is consequently doubled (and often further multiplied) inasmuch as he or she begins to perceive herself from both the position of this image and from her own, ordinary position of perception. Consciousness, then, can be said to not be extinguished in the trance but doubled and pluralized *in images* such that “a” subject proves to be exactly where one should not be.

Showing more precisely how a pluralized subject is possible at the level of a consciousness of (mental) images has required two further steps: not only, first, an extensive criticism of the equation of consciousness with self-presence in the writings of Derrida and Deleuze (whose respective criticisms of phenomenology has been adopted throughout the humanities and social sciences in United States) but also, second, a precise means of linking the channels’ questions about and descriptions of their psychological experience to philosophy. I found this in the teachings and writings of a channel who achieved a great deal of fame in the United States by publishing a series of speculative books that she dictated while in a trance. This channel, whose name is Jane Roberts, herself posed (in terms whose occasional imprecision in made up for by their perspicacity) the question of how the consciousness she retained in the trance was possible. She realized that a literally double

consciousness would require a sense of unity not possible through simple self-reference, and this led her to postulate her visions, in which she often saw herself as other people, as the domain in which such a consciousness occurs. Studying her “theory” allowed me to realize (well before reading the work of anthropologists and philosophers did) that *the mental image* is the means by which channels have consciousness. Sartre’s discussion, in *The Imagination*, of how mental images are not individuated as discrete unities but can appear to be two or more things at once, provided the key to understanding Roberts and the channels on this point. When one “thinks” through mental images, as Sartre explains, images of oneself may already be another, and to the extent that one perceives or reflects on oneself through such images, one occupies two distinct positions that nonetheless remain joined. I call this state “*plural consciousness*.”

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

My proposal to the Fyssen Foundation is, first, to revise my dissertation (in which I make the above argument) into a book and to prepare two major articles from it for publication. I also want to undertake further field research in order to extend my current work into the domain of another problem. I intend for this research to result in two articles.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Although I have developed an argument for how what Sartre calls “the consciousness of the image” allows the pluralized enunciator established in the act of channeling to achieve a corresponding consciousness of itself, I would like now to engage in further research in order to explore the relation of this consciousness to psychiatric disorder and religious experience. Is “plural consciousness,” that is, mostly exclusive to channels, or is it found in other religious contexts and/or other social groups? And if so, what can it tell us about the conditions of religious experience in these other contexts? The stakes of these questions lie not so much in the gains in factual knowledge they could yield but in what these facts might say generally about religious experience itself and its relation to psychological trauma (whose definition would require some retooling). The hypothesis I would like to develop, for reasons I outline below, is that “plural consciousness” is more common than it would seem, and that it may be brought about through a process of religious education that allows the individual to master pathological psychological states that are likely to be responses to trauma.

In a series of recent publications (with which I became acquainted only after developing the arguments adumbrated in 2.2), the former University of Chicago and now Stanford psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann has shown that Evangelical Christians in the United States tend to hear “God” speaking within them through entering a cognitive state that is very similar to the above consciousness: attention to external stimuli becomes attenuated while awareness of internal stimuli—“inner voices” and mental images—greatly increases (Luhrmann 2005, 2010). Drawing on the work of Tellegen, Luhrmann calls this state “absorption” and shows that Christians identified by their peers as being highly adept at prayer and “hearing the spirit” tend to rank very highly on a psychological metric called the Tellegen Absorption Scale, which measures tendencies to become lost in imagination, aesthetic experience, and perceptions of the natural environment. She would thus seem to have confirmed that something akin to what I call plural consciousness is not uncommon or exotic in the United States (where over 25% of

the population are Evangelicals), even if it is interpreted in very different terms. (Christians, that is, do not mistake themselves for “God” when they hear “his” voice.)

Beyond greatly expanding the relevance of plural consciousness as a concept, what interests me about Luhrmann’s research is the use she makes of it in order to address a major, unanswered problem concerning possession and trance in the North American context. After flourishing from the 1880’s to about the 1910’s, the dissociative psychopathology and conversion symptoms typical of hysteria (and, in the American context, neurasthenia) almost completely disappear but then suddenly re-emerge in the 1980s and 1990s with the explosion of multiple personality disorder (MPD) in the United States. (Multiple personality disorder is now called “dissociative identity disorder,” and I will thus refer to it from here out as MPD/DID.) Fieldwork I did with patients diagnosed with multiple personalities at the beginning of graduate school leads me to strongly concur with Luhrmann that arguments (such as those of Hacking 1995) that the flourishing of MPD/DID was almost entirely an artifact of historical transformations in psychiatric knowledge and thus linguistic description cannot be true: dissociative symptoms such as possession by other personalities, depersonalization, and periodic amnesia, have a distinct, extralinguistic reality. However, I take issue with her own explanation about the reappearance of dissociation in the 1980s. Her argument is that the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity from the 1960s onward created a discursive context wherein concern with internal mental processes become widespread and in which “psychiatric patients [were] more likely to pay attention to anomalous experience, and more likely to report it to clinicians,” who were in turn more likely to shape these patients’ expectations that “a rich inner life,” involving other personalities, is “the response to trauma” (Luhrmann 2005: 139). I find this argument extremely persuasive in certain respects. There is doubtlessly something to what it claims about history—the cultural shift the United States underwent as evangelical Christianity gained prominence between the 1960s and 1980s was huge—but the role it grants history (unlike most explanations of this sort) is not absolute, since Luhrmann suggests that absorption may be a response to trauma. Yet at the same time, trauma and thus dissociation—the latter being a psychological state, again, in which ordinary consciousness is lost and one feels controlled or acted through by another—may play a larger, more primary role here than Luhrmann’s theory allows.

I say this because channels frequently link psychological trauma to an increased capacity for dissociation and absorption, and have in several cases confided in me their own histories of trauma (which do not involve, it should be said, “recovered memory therapy”). They also often link their ability to channel to overcoming involuntary episodes of possession, which strongly resemble dissociation as it occurs in MPD/DID, through spiritual training and exercise (this often happens in the context of other types of spirit possession). Now given both the explicit phenomenological similarity between the psychological experience of channels and psychiatric patients with multiple personalities and the significant overlap in their cultural histories (some key exemplars of 19<sup>th</sup>-C. hysteria were also spirit mediums: see Breuer and Freud 2000; Flournoy 1994, and Jung 1970), channels should probably be heeded in their views and trauma explored as a primary condition of “plural consciousness” as I have defined it and thus possibly of virtuosity at religious consciousness generally in the U.S. My proposal for doing this entails (1.) determining whether the “plural consciousness” peculiar to channels and individuals with multiple personalities effectively involves the same types and degrees of absorptive states but with far less dissociation on the part of channels, and (2.) assessing to what extent members of each group have undergone traumatic events that can be readily confirmed (i.e. that were not

recalled through “recovered memory therapy,” which uses to hypnosis to retrieve memories that it may simply implant). Should absorptive states turn out to be more or less the same in both groups, dissociation come up as less pronounced among channels, and traumatic events appear with approximately the same frequency in the backgrounds of both groups, then two things are likely: plural consciousness indeed correlates with a history of trauma, and channels are correct to state that a process of religious education is what has allowed them to refine it into an absorptive state whose dissociative dimensions are neither “pathological” nor injurious.

The theoretical consequences would in that event *not* be, as Luhrmann’s argument suggests, that the historical and sociocultural shaping of the individual is primary in the emergence of plural consciousness but, rather, that psychological trauma plays a key role in bringing it about and that education becomes a means of amplifying its absorptive features while refining its dissociative dimension until it is only minimally involuntary and harmful.

I have, then, two primary objectives in my research: (1.) to determine, through an at once quantitative and qualitative survey, if absorption occurs to the same degree and in the same ways among channels and individuals with multiple personalities, and if dissociation occurs to a far lesser degree among channels; (2.) to determine if channels report both credible histories of psychological trauma and dissociative symptoms (which are generally no longer active) typical of a dissociative disorder as defined by the relevant psychiatric literature (e.g. Putnam 1989) and to see if channels, as my fieldwork suggests, generally undergo a process of spiritual training in which they indeed refine dissociation into a ritual and largely nonharmful/nonpathological form.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

(1.) In order to achieve my first objective, I will score subjects from both groups on two relevant psychological scales. First, I want to assess both groups using the Tellegen Absorption Scale (TAS). Since the likelihood that channels will not score highly on the scale is low, my initial purpose here will be to confirm that people with multiple personalities generally evince the same heightened focus on internal voices and images the general clinical portrait of the disorder and my own experience with them indicates (see Putnam 1989 for a definitive clinical portrait). I will be looking to see if TAS ratings are equal or very proximate in both groups, i.e. on the same, highest 5-point tier on a 35 point scale. Since I expect that the same high degrees of “absorption” can be easily established between the two groups, my next, chief goal will be to see if the main features of the internal absorption of channels—strong internal imagery and internal voices—are also central to that of individuals with MPD/DID. I will give the questionnaire for the TAS in conjunction with an interview concerning absorptive features of the general experience of both groups; this interview will rate the degree to which subjects engage in absorptive kinds of cognition, which will be defined on the basis of “indigenous” categories in the case of channels and according to the clinical description of MPD/DID in its case.

I will further pursue my first objective by scoring both groups on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), a measurement of depersonalization (not recognizing oneself), disturbances of memory, involuntary behavior, and other essential features of psychological dissociation. While I do intend here to establish that DES scores will be far higher than average among channels (this is already known to be the case with MPD patients), I also am anticipating a few key differences—namely, both higher general scores for both groups and much higher scores for amnesia, depersonalization, and involuntary feelings of possession

(described in the psychiatric literature as “loss of executive control”) among individuals with multiple personalities than among channels. This is likely to be the case because channels only rarely evince such problems and engage almost exclusively in voluntary dissociation.

(2.) I will pursue my second objective through structured interviews aimed at accounting for the role played in their lives by traumatic events, involuntary and/or harmful dissociation, and the transformation of such dissociation into the more volitional form of channeling. The types of traumatic events encountered (childhood sexual violence, sexual violence in adult life, committing violent acts, etc.) must be accounted for, but my general concern will be whether a major violent and/or extremely intrusive event or pattern of such events occurred in the lifetime of the individual and was regarded as traumatic by them, and whether pathological dissociation was once a characteristic feature of their psychic life. (I am avoiding the problem of what constitutes “real” trauma by looking for what are generally considered extraordinarily violent or trying events and letting the surveyed subjects decide whether they are traumatic.) I expect that what I found in my fieldwork—channels reported about half the time that they have experienced significant psychological trauma—indicates that a similar correlation will emerge if a larger sample is polled.

Since I have already done extensive fieldwork with channels, access to subjects poses little problem. Past fieldwork with people with multiple personalities will allow me to call on past contacts among patients, psychotherapists, and psychiatrists in order to find sufficient informants for a large sample.

#### RESEARCH TIMELINE

I would begin initial interviewing in the month of July, prior to leaving the U.S. for Paris. After analyzing my preliminary data and attending to the writing of two articles devoted to my current research (section 2.2), I would conduct further interviews in December and January. I would do these on the East Coast of the United States in order to minimize travel costs. After that, I would do follow up interviews and any remaining first interviews by phone from Paris. I would then analyze the data and produce one to two papers on it in the spring months. (Should the Fyssen fellowship be renewed in my case, I would decide at that point in what direction to take my research in the second year.)

#### EXPECTED RESULTS

Expected results. As indicated above, I expect, on the basis of prior fieldwork with both groups, the following results: first, absorptive states will turn out to be more or less the same in both groups, dissociation will be less pronounced among channels, and traumatic events will appear with commensurate frequency in the backgrounds of both groups, i.e. more than would be ordinary in the population; second, plural consciousness will correlate with a history of trauma, and a process of religious education will be seen to be what has allowed channels to refine it into an absorptive state whose dissociative dimensions are neither “pathological” nor injurious.

#### THEORETICAL CONSEQUENCES

The theoretical consequences, as I gestured to above, will be twofold: (1.) sociocultural molding (and *habitus* in the Aristotelian sense) will not be as determinative of religious absorption and dissociation as Luhrmann claims and as a group of anthropologists with

whom she is in dialogue also would (that is, Asad, Hirschkind, and Mahmood), i.e. traumatic events may enable these cognitive capacities, which would only afterward be given cultural shape; (2.) evidence is given to the possibility that virtuoso religious consciousness of other types is initially enabled by traumatic events, which will justify further inquiry about this link.

#### HOW THIS RESEARCH ADVANCES THE GOALS OF THE FYSEN FOUNDATION

My proposed research will advance knowledge of how it is that cognitive states at the border of the socio-cultural and the psychological are transmitted through processes of religious education and the experience of traumatic violence.

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