Silo

Collected Works

Humanize the Earth
Guided Experiences
Contributions to Thought
Universal Root Myths
Day of the Winged Lion
Letters to My Friends
Silo Speaks

Volume I

Compilation copyright © 1998, 2002 Silo. English translation copyright © 2003 TWM, Silo. All rights reserved.
This edition contains the complete unabridged text of each work.
Translated from the Spanish. New Humanism Translation Committee. Daniel Zuckerbrot and Paul Tooby.

Humanize the Earth: The Inner Look, The Internal Landscape, The Human Landscape
The Inner Look copyright © 1975, 1999 TWM, Silo (*La Mirada Interna* © 1972, 1988 Silo)
The Internal Landscape copyright © 1981, 1999 TWM, Silo (*El Paisaje Interno* © 1981, 1988 Silo)
The Human Landscape copyright 1999 TWM, Silo (*El Paisaje Humano* © 1988 Silo)

Guided Experiences copyright © 1993, 2003 TWM, Silo (*Experiencias Guiadas* © 1980, 1988 Silo).
First published in English as *Tales for Heart and Mind: The Guided Experiences, A Storybook for Grownups* in the New Humanism Series, Latitude Press, 1993.

Contributions to Thought copyright © 2003 TWM, Silo (*Contribuciones al Pensamiento* © 1988, 1989 Silo)

Universal Root Myths copyright © 2003 TWM, Silo (*Mitos Raíces Universales* © 1990 Silo)

Day of the Winged Lion copyright © 1994, 2003 TWM, Silo (*El Día del León Alado* © 1991 Silo)

Letters to My Friends copyright © 1994 TWM, Silo (*Cartas a Mis Amigos* © 1991–1994 Silo).
First published in English as *Letters to My Friends: On Social and Personal Crisis in Today's World* in the New Humanism Series, Latitude Press, 1994.

Silo Speaks copyright © 2000, 2003 TWM, Silo (*Habla Silo* © 1969–1995 Silo)

This version has been updated to agree with the first edition published in 2003.

Contents

Introduction viii

Humanize the Earth 1

The Inner Look *2*

I. Meditation 3
II. Disposition to Comprehend 4
III. Non-Meaning 5
IV. Dependence 6
V. Intimation of Meaning 7
VI. Sleep and Awakening 8
VII. Presence of the Force 9
VIII. Control of the Force 10
IX. Manifestations of the Energy 11
X. Evidence of Meaning 12
XI. The Luminous Center 13
XII. The Discoveries 14
XIII. The Principles 15
XIV. Guide to the Inner Road 17
XV. The Experience of Peace and the Passage of the Force 19
XVI. Projection of the Force 21
XVII. Loss and Repression of the Force 22
XVIII. Action and Reaction of the Force 23
XIX. The Internal States 24
XX. Internal Reality 27

The Internal Landscape 28

I. The Question 29
II. Reality 30
III. The External Landscape 31
IV. The Human Landscape 32
V. The Internal Landscape 33
VI. Center and Reflection 34
VII. Pain, Suffering, and Meaning in Life 35
VIII. The Rider and His Shadow 36
IX. Contradiction and Unity 38
X. Valid Action 41
XI. Projection of the Internal Landscape 43
XII. Compensation, Reflection, and the Future 44
XIII. Provisional Meanings 45
XIV. Faith 46
XV. To Give and To Receive 47
XVI. Models 48
XVII. The Internal Guide 49
XVIII. The Change 50

The Human Landscape 51
I. Looks and Landscapes 52
II. The External Look and That Which Is Human 54
III. The Human Body as the Object of Intention 56
IV. Memory and the Human Landscape 57
V. The Distance Imposed by the Human Landscape 58
VI. Education 60
VII. History 61
VIII. Ideologies 62
IX. Violence 63
X. Law 64
XI. The State 66
XII. Religion 68
XIII. Open Roads 71
Notes to Humanize the Earth 72

Guided Experiences 76
Part One: Tales
I. The Child 77
II. An Enemy 79
III. My Greatest Mistake 81
IV. Nostalgia 84
V. My Ideal 85
VI. Resentment 87
VII. The Protector of Life 89
VIII. The Rescue 91
IX. False Hopes 94
X. Repetitions 96
XI. The Journey 98
XII. The Festival 100
XIII. Death 102
Part Two: Playing with Images
I. The Creature 105
II. The Snowmobile 107
III. The Chimney Sweep 109
IV. Descent 111
V. Ascent 112
VI. The Costumes 113
VII. The Clouds 115
VIII. To and Fro 117
IX. The Miner 118
Notes to Guided Experiences 120

Contributions to Thought 127
Psychology of the Image 128
Introduction 128
Chapter 1: The Problem of Space in the Study of Phenomena of Consciousness 129
1.1 Background • 1.2 Distinctions Among Sensation, Perception, and Image
1.3 The Idea of "Consciousness-Being-in-the-World" as a Descriptive Touchstone in Facing the Interpretations of Naive Psychology • 1.4 The Internal Register Through Which the Image Is Given in Some "Place"

Contents

Chapter 2: Location of What Is Represented in the Spatiality of Representation 134
2.1 Different Types of Perception and Representation • 2.2 The Interaction of Images Referred to Different Perceptual Sources • 2.3 Representation: Capacity for Transformation • 2.4 Recognition and Non-recognition of the Perceived
2.5 Image of the Perception and Perception of the Image

Chapter 3: Configuration of the Space of Representation 138
3.1 Variations of the Space of Representation in Relation to the Levels of Consciousness
3.2 Variations of the Space of Representation in States of Altered Consciousness
3.3 The Nature of the Space of Representation • 3.4 Copresence, Horizon, and Landscape in the System of Representation

Notes to Psychology of the Image 143

Historiological Discussions 147

Introduction 147

Chapter 1: The Past as Viewed from the Present 148
1.1 The Distortion of Mediated History • 1.2 The Distortion of Immediate History

Chapter 2: The Past Seen as Without Temporal Foundation 151
2.1 Conceptions of History • 2.2 History as Form

Chapter 3: History and Temporality 154
3.1 Temporality and Process • 3.2 Horizon and Temporal Landscape
3.3 Human History • 3.4 The Prerequisites for Historiology

Notes to Historiological Discussions 162

Universal Root Myths 169

Introduction to Universal Root Myths 170

I. Sumerian-Akkadian Myths 174
Gilgamesh and the Creation of His Double • The Cedar Forest • The Celestial Bull, the Death of Enkidu and the Descent to the Hells • The Universal Flood • The Return

II. Assyro-Babylonian Myths 180
The Original Chaos • The Gods and Marduk • The War of the Gods
The Creation of the World • The Creation of the Human Being

III. Egyptian Myths 184
Ptah and Creation • The Death and Resurrection of Osiris
Horus the Divine Avenger • The Antimyth of Amenophis IV

IV. Hebrew Myths 189
The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life • Abraham and Obedience
The Man Who Fought Against a God • Moses and the Divine Law

V. Chinese Myths 195
The Central Void • The Dragon and the Phoenix

VI. Indian Myths 197
Fire, Torment, and Exaltation • Time and the Gods • The Forms of Beauty and Horror

VII. Persian Myths 201
The Clamor of Zarathustra • Light and Darkness
The Angels and the Savior: The End of the World, Resurrection, and Judgment

VIII. Greco-Roman Myths 203
The Struggle Between the Generations of Immortals • Prometheus and the Awakening of the Mortals • Demeter and Persephone: Death and the Resurrection of Nature • Dionysus, the Divine Madness

IX. Nordic Myths 208
Thor, the Valkyries, and Valhalla: The Warrior and His Heaven • Ragnarök, the Destiny of the Gods

X. American Myths – *Popol Vuh* (*Book of the Quiché People*) 211
The Lost History • Human Generations: The Man-Animal, the Man of Clay, the Man of Wood, and the Man of Corn • The Destruction of the False Principal Macaw at the Hands of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer • The Ball Game in the Hells: Descent, Death, Resurrection, and Ascent of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer

Notes to Universal Root Myths 215

Day of the Winged Lion 236

Short Stories

House of Transit 237
The Great Silence 238
Enter Your Answer! 239
The Funeral Pyre 241
Salt in the Eyes, Ice on the Feet 242

Tales

Kaunda 244
Pamphlet to the Rhythm of a Tango 247
The Case of Poe 253

Fictions

Software and Hardware 258
The Huntress 266
Day of the Winged Lion 273

Letters to My Friends 282

First Letter to My Friends 283

1. The Present Situation • 2. The Alternative of a Better World • 3. Social Evolution
4. Future Experiments • 5. Change and Relationships Among People
6. A Tale for Aspiring Executives • 7. Human Change

Second Letter to My Friends 290

1. Some Positions Regarding the Present Process of Change
2. Individualism, Social Fragmentation, and the Concentration of Power in a Few
3. Characteristics of the Crisis • 4. Positive Factors of Change

Third Letter to My Friends 296

1. Change and Crisis • 2. Disorientation • 3. Crisis in the Life of Each Person
4. The Need to Give Direction to One's Life • 5. Direction in Life and Changing One's Situation
6. Coherent Behavior • 7. The Two Proposals: Coherence and Solidarity
8. Reaching All of Society Starting with One's Immediate Environment • 9. The Social Environment in Which One Lives • 10. Coherence as a Direction in Life • 11. Proportion in One's Actions as a Step Toward Coherence • 12. Well-Timed Actions as a Step Toward Coherence • 13. Growing Adaptation as an Advance Toward Coherence

Fourth Letter to My Friends 303

1. The Starting Point for Our Ideas • 2. The Human Being: Nature, Intention, and Opening
3. The Human Being: Social and Historical Opening • 4. The Transforming Action of the Human Being • 5. Overcoming Pain and Suffering as Basic Vital Projects
6. Image, Belief, Look, and Landscape • 7. The Generations and Historical Moments
8. Violence, the State, and the Concentration of Power • 9. The Human Process

Fifth Letter to My Friends 312

1. The Most Important Issue: To Know If One Wants to Live, and In What Conditions
2. Human Liberty: Source of All Meaning • 3. Intention: Orientor of Action
4. What Should We Do with Our Lives? • 5. Moral Consciousness and Short-Term Interests
6. Sacrificing One's Objectives for Circumstantial Success: Some Habitual Errors
7. The Kingdom of the Secondary

Sixth Letter to My Friends 319

Statement of the Humanist Movement
320

I. Global Capital • II. Real Democracy Versus Formal Democracy • III. The Humanist Position
IV. From Naive Humanism to Conscious Humanism
V. The Anti-Humanist Camp • VI. Humanist Action Fronts

Seventh Letter to My Friends 327
1. Destructive Chaos or Revolution • 2. Of What Revolution Are We Speaking?
3. Action Fronts in the Revolutionary Process • 4. Revolutionary Process and Revolutionary Direction

Eighth Letter to My Friends 335
1. The Need to Redefine the Role of the Armed Forces • 2. Continuing Factors of Aggression in This Period of Reduced Tensions • 3. Internal Security and Military Restructuring • 4. A Review of the Concepts of Sovereignty and Security • 5. The Legality and Limits of Established Power • 6. Military Responsibility to Political Power • 7. Military Restructuring • 8. The Military's Position in the Revolutionary Process • 9. Considerations on the Military and Revolution

Ninth Letter to My Friends 343
1. Violations of Human Rights • 2. Human Rights, Peace, and Humanitarianism as Pretexts for Intervention • 3. The Other Human Rights
4. The Universality of Human Rights and the Cultural Thesis

Tenth Letter to My Friends 350
1. Destructuring and Its Limits • 2. Some Important Areas of the Phenomenon of Destructuring
3. Targeted Action

Notes on Letters to My Friends 350

Silo Speaks 358
Note to the Reader 359

I.Opinions, Commentaries, and Speeches

The Healing of Suffering – *Punta de Vacas, Argentina, May 4, 1969* 360
Valid Action – *Grand Canary Island, September 29, 1978* 364
On the Riddle of Perception – *Grand Canary Island, October 1, 1978* 371
Meaning of Life – *Mexico City, October 10, 1980* 378
The Volunteer – *Mexico City, October 11, 1980* 385
Public Talk in Madrid – *Madrid, September 27, 1981* 388
Talk at an Agricultural Collective – *Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 20, 1981* 391
Public Talk in Bombay – *Bombay, India, November 1, 1981* 396
Regarding What Is Human – *Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 1, 1983* 398
Religiosity in the Contemporary World – *Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 6, 1986* 401

II. Book Presentations

Guided Experiences – El Ateneo, Madrid, Spain, November 3, 1989 413
Humanize the Earth – Reykjavik, Iceland, November 13, 1989 425
Contributions to Thought – Buenos Aires, October 4, 1990 431
Universal Root Myths – Buenos Aires, April 18, 1991 440
Philosophy and Literary Works – *Santiago, Chile, May 23, 1991* 448
Letters to My Friends – Santiago, Chile May 14, 1994 457

III. Talks

Humanism and the New World – *Mexico City, July 7, 1991* 463
Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization – *Moscow, June 18, 1992* 466
A Contemporary View of Humanism – *Madrid, April 16, 1993* 472
The Conditions of Dialogue – *Moscow, October 6, 1993* 481
Humanist Forum – *Moscow, October 7, 1993* 485
What Do We Understand Universalist Humanism to Mean Today? 490
Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 24, 1994

The Theme of God: Seminar on Philosophical-Religious Dialogue 499
Buenos Aires Argentina, October 29, 1995

Introduction

The writings of Silo have reached the public only in fragmentary form to this point, so that interested readers have been unable to follow these works in an orderly and complete way. The publication of these *Collected Works* aims to correct this problem, presenting these diverse works in the order in which they initially appeared. Nonetheless, because the author has followed a thematic rather than chronological order in his extensive and continuing literary production, this ordering could give rise in the future to some confusion regarding the overall continuity of the works.

The publication of these *Collected Works* also faces practical problems owing to the size of the collection, which cannot be solved through such expedients as simply resorting to smaller type or thinner paper. It has thus become necessary to add additional volumes to keep the collection manageable, and to this end the second volume will soon make its appearance.

This initial volume contains Silo's first seven works: *Humanize the Earth, Guided Experiences, Contributions to Thought, Universal Root Myths, Day of the Winged Lion, Letters to My Friends,* and *Silo Speaks.* While the introductions and the talks by the author about these books that have accompanied earlier editions of many of these works are not part of the present volume, some of this material has been included in Silo Speaks. And in an attempt to fill this void, we provide below brief commentaries to give the reader a general framework for the subject matter of each of the works.

1. *Humanize the Earth* is a collection of three writings that have in common their style of poetic prose, an exhortative turn of phrase, and numbered passages. The first work, *The Inner Look,* was completed in 1972 and revised in 1988; the second, *The Internal Landscape,* was written in 1981 and subsequently revised in 1988; and finally, *The Human Landscape* was completed in 1988. Between the initial publication of *The Inner Look* and its revision sixteen years elapsed, during which time the book circulated in many languages of both East and West, giving rise to personal communication and correspondence between the author and readers from many latitudes. That exchange surely contributed to the author's revisions of several chapters as he observed how the different cultural substrata in which the work was circulating gave rise to many differences in interpretation of the texts. Certain words in particular presented serious difficulties in translation, and readers would frequently misunderstand the sense in which they were used.

Much the same took place with *The Internal Landscape,* although in that case seven years elapsed between the original publication and the author's revisions to the text. The revisions of the first two books were finished in the same year the third book was completed, fulfilling the author's intention to revise and update the first two books as he wrote the third and to compile all of them into a single volume.

The Human Landscape, while maintaining the basic stylistic qualities of the preceding two works, unlike them emphasizes particularities of the cultural and social world. This forces a turn in the treatment of these themes that inevitably involves all aspects of this literary work.

Regarding content, we can say that *The Inner Look* focuses on meaning in life. The principal theme of its discourse is the psychological state of *contradiction.* It makes explicit that suffering is the register that one has of contradiction, and that surpassing mental suffering is possible in the measure that one's life is oriented toward non-contradictory actions in general and

non-contradictory actions in relation to other people in particular. *The Internal Landscape* studies non-meaning in life in relation to the struggle against nihilism within each human being and in social life, exhorting readers to transform their lives into activity and militancy at the service of humanizing the world. Finally, *The Human Landscape* treats the question of establishing a foundation for action in the world, realigning meanings and interpretations of values and institutions that had seemed beyond question and accepted as established once and for all.

The three writings that comprise *Humanize the Earth* are in fact three moments that follow in a sequence running from the most profound internal world—the world of dreams and symbols—toward the external and human landscapes. They involve a journey, a movement in point of view that begins in the most intimate and personal and ends in opening toward the interpersonal, social, and historical world.

2. *Guided Experiences* was originally written in 1980 and revised in 1988. The work consists of two parts. The first, “Tales,” is a collection of thirteen stories that comprise the more dense and complex part of the work. The second part, “Playing with Images,” includes nine descriptions that are simpler than those of the first part.

This material may be viewed in various ways. From a superficial point of view, it may be seen as a series of short stories with happy endings. Another focus, however, reveals this work as a series of psychological practices based on literary forms. While all the stories are written in the first person, it should be noted that this “first person” is not the one habitually found in other writings. Rather than that of the author, the first person in this work is that of the reader—each story provides a different setting that serves as a frame for the reader to fill with his or her own life and concerns.

As an aid, asterisks (*) appear at intervals throughout the text to mark pauses at key points that can help the reader—or listener—introduce, mentally, the images that transform a passive reader into an actor in and coauthor of each description. This original form also allows one person to read aloud (observing the aforementioned pauses), while each listener imagines his or her own literary “knot.” This approach—the hallmark of these writings—would in more conventional stories destroy all plot sequence.

It should be noted that in every literary piece, the reader—or spectator in the case of plays, films, or television programs—can identify more or less fully with the characters, while recognizing, either at the time or later on, differences between the actor playing the role in the piece and the observer, who is “outside” the production and is none other than the spectator him or herself. However, in these writings quite the opposite occurs: The main character is at once the observer, agent, and recipient of the actions and emotions.

3. *Contributions to Thought* consists of two essays. The first, “Psychology of the Image,” was written in 1988, and the second, “Historiological Discussions,” was completed in 1989. While they pertain to distinct fields, the two works are closely related—and in a sense mutually clarifying—and their publication under the inclusive title *Contributions to Thought* seems entirely appropriate. The approach used in both essays is characteristic of philosophical reflection, and does not come from either psychology or historiography, with each work addressing its respective discipline with the intention of providing a foundation.

In “Psychology of the Image” the author sets forth a novel theory for what he terms the “space of representation”—the “space” that arises when objects of re-presentation (not simply of perception) are present and without which it is not possible to understand how it is that the consciousness is able to direct itself toward and distinguish between the so-called “external

world" and "internal world." At the same time, if perception gives the perceiver an awareness of the phenomena, where does the perceiver locate him or herself with respect to these phenomena? For if we say that the one perceiving locates him or herself in the external spatiality, in accordance with the externality of the perceived phenomenon, then how is it that the perceiver is able to move his or her body "from inside," guiding it in that externality? It is possible to explain the arrival of data to the consciousness by means of perception, but one cannot in this way account for the movement that the consciousness imprints on the body. Can the body act in the external world without the existence of a representation of both terms? Obviously not. And that representation must therefore occur in some "place" of the consciousness. But in what sense can we speak of "place" or "color" or "extension" in the consciousness?

These are some of the difficulties that the author successfully overcomes in the present essay, whose objective is to support the following thesis: a) the image is an active mode of the consciousness-being-in-the-world, and not simple passivity as maintained by previous theories; b) this active mode cannot be independent of an internal "spatiality"; and c) the numerous functions fulfilled by the image depend on the placement of the image in this "spatiality."

If what the author maintains is correct, the action of the human being must be reinterpreted. No longer is it the "idea," or some supposed "will," or "objective need" itself that moves the body toward things—it is, rather, the image, and the emplacement of the image in the space of representation. The "idea" or "objective need" can orient activity in the measure that they are emplaced as an image—and in a perspective of representation—in an appropriate internal landscape. And it is not only needs or ideas that have this possibility—beliefs and even emotions converted into images have this capacity as well. The consequences that derive from this are enormous, as the author seems to suggest in the close of the work with these words: "If images allow recognition and action, then according to the structure of the landscape and the needs of individuals and peoples (or according to what they consider their needs to be), they will, in the same way, tend to transform the world."

In "Historiological Discussions" the author reviews the various conceptions of history, grouping them under the designation "history without temporality." Why, until now, has human history been told considering humankind as an epiphenomenon, or a simple transmission gear that fulfills the function of being the subject of extrinsic factors? What is the reason for this lack of a sufficient explanation of temporality and its nature? The author explains that Historiology will become a science only in the measure that it can answer these questions and clarify the necessary prerequisites for all historical discourse—that is, of what historicity and what temporality are we speaking?

In the introduction to "Historiological Discussions" the author says: "My objective in this work is to clarify the prerequisites for a foundation of historiology. It is clear that knowledge of the dates of historical events will not, in itself, even when supported by the latest research techniques, be sufficient to establish a claim that such knowledge is scientific." Historiology cannot do without an understanding of the structure of human life, since the historiologist—even when he or she wishes to carry out simple, natural history—will find him or herself compelled to structure history from an optic and an interpretation that are *human.* Human life is precisely historicity—temporality—and in understanding that temporality lies the key to all historical construction.

But how is it that human events unfold, how is it that some events become others? The generations in their temporal accumulation are the agents of every historical process, and even

when they coexist in the same moment, the landscape of formation, development, and struggle of one generation differs from those of other generations because some are born prior to others. While child and elder apparently live in the same historical time, even though they coexist they represent distinct landscapes and temporal accumulations. Successive generations are born one following the other in a biological continuum, but what characterizes them is their constitution, which is social and temporal.

4. *Universal Root Myths* was written in 1990. This work has been conceived with the interest of comparing the basic systems of tensions in which the peoples who have produced the great myths of humankind have lived. The author also provides a brief introduction to the book, which the reader may consult to understand the approach and method used in this treatment of the principal myths of ten cultures.

5. *Day of the Winged Lion* includes some brief writings, longer stories with more complex plots, and several fantasies that resemble science fiction, with the work taking its title from the final story, “Day of the Winged Lion.” The author, traveling new roads of literary experience, provides us with stories of thought-provoking originality, among which “Salt in the Eyes, Ice on the Feet” stands out. For those acquainted with these *Collected Works,* in particular the essay “Psychology of the Image,” the aforementioned story can be recognized as a clear application of the author’s theory of the consciousness in this description of a most surprising event. Other writings in this work touch upon such things as the moving situation of an African leader with no way out, and the activities of a superman who, in developing his gymnastic abilities, ultimately succeeds in overcoming the law of gravity.

6. The *Letters to My Friends* were published individually as the author wrote them. From the time the first was completed on February 21, 1991 until the tenth and final one was written on December 15, 1993, almost three years elapsed. During this time, major global transformations took place in almost all fields of human endeavor. If the speed of change continues to increase as it did over this period, a reader in decades to come will encounter serious problems in understanding the world context to which the author continually makes reference, and may as a consequence only with difficulty grasp many of the ideas expressed in these writings. For this reason, we recommend to those hypothetical readers of the future that they would do well to have at hand a summary of the events that took place in the years from 1991 to 1994. We suggest that they seek a broad understanding of the economic and technological developments of the period, of the famines and conflicts, of the trends in mass media and fashion. We would ask that they listen to the music, review images of the architecture and urban design, consider the overcrowding of the megacities, the massive migrations, the environmental deterioration, and the way of life of that curious historical moment. Above all, we would urge them to delve into the squabblings of those formers of opinion—the philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists of that cruel and stupid age. While these letters speak of a certain present, they were most definitely written with an eye to the future, and we believe it is there that they will have to be confirmed or refuted.

The work does not follow a general plan, but is, rather, a series of occasional commentaries that may be read in any order. Nevertheless, the following classification could be attempted: a) the first three letters emphasize the experiences that touch the life of the individual, immersed in a global situation that becomes more complicated day-by-day; b) the fourth letter presents the general structure of the ideas on which all the letters are based; c) the subsequent letters outline the socio-political thought of the author; and d) the tenth letter addresses tactical action in light of the global process.

Next we will highlight some of the themes in the letters. *First letter:* The situation in which we find ourselves living. The disintegration of institutions and the crisis of solidarity. The new sensibilities and behavior taking shape in the world today. Criteria for action. *Second letter:* The factors of change in today's world and the positions habitually taken in facing this change. *Third letter:* The characteristics of change and the crisis in relation to the immediate environment in which we live. *Fourth letter:* The foundations of the opinions expressed by the author on the most general questions of human life, humanity's needs, and basic projects. The natural and social worlds. The concentration of power; violence; the State. *Fifth letter:* Human liberty, intention, and action. The ethical meaning of social practice and militancy, and their most habitual defects. *Sixth letter:* An exposition of the thought of New Humanism. *Seventh letter:* Social revolution. *Eighth letter:* The armed forces. *Ninth letter:* Human rights. *Tenth letter:* The generalized process of destructuring. Applying global understanding to minimum concrete action.

The fourth letter, of central importance in the ideological justification of the entire book, can be understood in greater depth by reading another of the author's works, *Contributions to Thought* (particularly the essay "Historiological Discussions"), as well as the talk "Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization" in *Silo Speaks,* the final book of this volume.

The sixth letter expresses the ideas of contemporary or New Humanism. The conceptual compactness of this letter recalls certain political and cultural productions, for example, the manifestos of the middle of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries such as the Communist or Surrealist Manifestos. The use of the word Statement in lieu of manifesto is due to a careful choice of words intended to distance this writing from the naturalism expressed in the Humanist Manifesto of 1933, inspired by Dewey, and from the social-liberalism of the Humanist Manifesto II of 1974, signed by Sakharov and strongly imbued with the thought of Lamont. While there are points of agreement between the present Statement and this second Humanist Manifesto in regard to the need for a framework for economic and environmental planning that does not destroy personal liberties, there are radical differences in political vision and in the conception of the human being.

With its extreme brevity in relation to the scope of the material it addresses, the sixth letter demands some further considerations. In this letter the author acknowledges the contributions of the many different cultures along the trajectory of humanism, as can clearly be observed in Jewish, Arab, and Eastern thought. In this sense, the Statement of the Humanist Movement cannot be placed in the Ciceronian tradition, as has so often been the case with Western humanisms. In his recognition of historical Humanism, the author revives themes that had been expressed as early as the twelfth century. This refers to the Goliard poets, who, like Hugo of Orleans and Peter of Blois, came to write the celebrated *In terra summus* of the *Codex Buranus* (or Beuern Codex, known in Latin as *Carmina Burana*). While Silo does not quote them directly, he echoes their words: "This is the great universal truth: Money is everything. Money is government, money is law, money is power. Money is basically sustenance, but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion. Nothing is done without money, nothing is possible without money. There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money. Even peaceful solitude depends on money." It is difficult to overlook the reflection of *In terra summus: "*The abbot keeps his Money in his prisoner's cell," when the author says, "Even peaceful solitude depends on money." Or here, "Money loves itself, and without it no one is loved…" when the author says: "There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money." The generalization of the Goliard poet, "Money, it is true, makes the

fool seem eloquent," appears in the letter as, "…but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion." And regarding the latter, the venerable poem says, "Money is adored because it works miracles… it causes the deaf to hear and the lame to leap." and so on. In this poem of the *Codex Buranus* that Silo takes as given we can see the implicit antecedents that are later to inspire the humanists of the sixteenth century, particularly Erasmus and Rabelais.

This letter presents the ideas of contemporary or New Humanism. For a more complete treatment of this theme, there is nothing better than to consult the talk by the author, "A Contemporary View of Humanism," in *Silo Speaks.*

The tenth and final letter explores the limits of the process of destructuring, and highlights three fields out of the many possible ones in which this phenomenon takes on special importance: politics, religion, and the generations, warning against the rise of neo-irrationalist facisms of authoritarian and violent character.

To illustrate the theme of global understanding and applying action to the minimum point of one's "immediate environment," the author makes this phenomenal jump in scale—in which we now find ourselves with our neighbor, our coworker, our friend. It is clear that every militant must now forget the mirage of superstructural political power, which lies mortally wounded at the hands of the growing destructuring. In the future, it will make no difference who the president is, who the prime minister, senator, representative, or deputy are. Political parties, unions, and syndicates will continue to move further away from their human bases. As the State suffers a thousand transformations, it will be only the largest corporations and international financial capital that continue to concentrate decision-making power worldwide—until overtaken by the collapse of the Parastate.

Of what use, then, will a militancy be that tries to occupy the empty shell of formal democracy? Without doubt, action must be proposed in one's minimum immediate environment, and it is only from there, based on concrete conflicts, that a real political representation can be constructed.

The existential problems of the social base are not expressed solely as economic and political difficulties, however, and while a party that espouses humanist ideas and instrumentally occupies parliamentary space will have institutional meaning, it will be unable to respond to the needs of the people. New power will be constructed from the social base as a broad Movement, decentralized and federative. And the question that all militants must ask is not, "Who will be the prime minister, representative, or deputy?" but instead, "How can we form our centers of direct communication and our networks of neighborhood councils? How can we open participation to all the smallest organizations of the base, through which people express issues related to work and sports as well as popular art, culture, and religion?" This Movement cannot be thought of in formal political terms, but rather in terms of a convergence of diversity. Neither can the growth of this Movement be conceived in the mold of a gradualism that will progressively gain space and social strata. Rather, it must be proposed in terms of a "demonstration effect," characteristic of a multi-connected planetary society given to reproducing and adapting the successes of a new model in collectivities that are widespread and very different from one another. In sum, this final letter outlines a minimal type of organization and strategy of action that corresponds to the present state of things.

In these notes we have focused particularly on letters four, six, and ten because we believe it is in these letters that readers will most be aided by the brief recommendations, citations, and complementary commentaries provided above.

7. *Silo Speaks.* This book recounts Silo's spoken words over the course of almost three decades. It is a compilation of major speeches, opinions, and commentaries presented by this thinker between 1969 and 1995, but does not include interviews with the news media. The texts are based on transcriptions of written notes as well as audio and video recordings.

The Editors

Note to the Translation

The translation of this first volume of Silo's collected works is related to the growing movement for social and personal change known as New Humanism. Accompanying this movement's development and revisions by the author, the translation of the present collection of seven works has been a cumulative effort spanning nearly thirty years, which has presented a number of challenges. In these works, the range of subject matter, genre, and voice is very broad, and we have attempted to strike a balance in rendering Silo's words that is both faithful to the originals and accessible, while doing justice to the author's poetic and provocative turn of phrase. The span of time over which these works were written and revised and the resulting wide range of treatment in their various translations has led to a lack of uniformity, with some books having been translated relatively quickly and others having decades-long histories of multiple translations. In light of the urgency of the times and the demand for these books, we are circulating this volume at the earliest possible date, recognizing that these translations are part of a dynamic process and that the uses and understandings of these works will continue to advance.

A great many people have participated over the years in making these translations possible, and among them the translators would like acknowledge the author's generous availability for correspondence regarding the translations. Some of these works have been translated or retranslated for this edition, and although the long history of the works and their various translations precludes a full account here, we wish to acknowledge the valuable assistance of many with early drafts, including Andrew Hurley with *Humanize the Earth* and *Silo Speaks;* Daniel Lemesoff with *Guided Experiences;* Adolfo Carpio with *Contributions to Thought;* Roberto Verdecchia with *Universal Root Myths, Day of the Winged Lion* and throughout*;* John Incledon with an earlier translation of *Day of the Winged Lion;* Jorge von Schouwen with *Letters to My Friends,* and Salvatore Puledda for invaluable assistance throughout. The talents and dedication of these and many others have brought these seven works to life in the English language, collected here in this volume.

Daniel Zuckerbrot and Paul Tooby
January, 2003

Humanize the Earth

The Inner Look

The Internal Landscape

The Human Landscape

The Inner Look

I. Meditation

1. Here it tells how the non-meaning of life can be converted into meaning and fulfillment.
2. Here are joy, love of the body, of nature, of humanity, and of the spirit.
3. Here sacrifices, feelings of guilt, and threats from the beyond are rejected.
4. Here the worldly is not opposed to the eternal.
5. Here it tells of the inner revelation at which all arrive who carefully meditate in humble search.

II. Disposition to Comprehend

1. I know how you feel because I can experience your state, but you do not know how to experience the things I am speaking of. Therefore, if I speak to you without self-interest of that which makes the human being happy and free, it is worth your while to try to comprehend.
2. Do not think that you will arrive at understanding by arguing with me. You may argue if you believe that through opposition your understanding will become clearer, but it is not the appropriate path in this case.
3. If you ask me what attitude is appropriate, I will tell you that it is to meditate profoundly and without haste on what is explained here.
4. If you reply that you are busy with more urgent things, I will answer that since your wish is to sleep or to die, I will do nothing to oppose it.
5. Nor should you argue that you dislike my way of presenting things, for you do not criticize the peel when you like the fruit.
6. I state things in the way I consider appropriate, not as might be desired by those who aspire to things remote from inner truth.

III. Non-Meaning

After many days I discovered this great paradox: Those who bore failure in their hearts were able to illuminate the final victory, while those who felt triumphant were left by the wayside like vegetation whose life is muted and diffuse. After many days, coming from the darkest of darkness, I arrived at the light, guided not by teachings but by meditation.

Thus, I told myself on the first day:

1. There is no meaning in life if everything ends with death.
2. All justification for actions, whether these actions are despicable or admirable, is always a new dream that leaves only emptiness ahead.
3. God is something uncertain.
4. Faith is something as variable as reason and dreams.
5. “What one should do” may be thoroughly discussed, but in the end there is nothing that definitively supports any position.
6. The “responsibility” of those who commit themselves to something is no greater than the responsibility of those who do not.
7. I move according to my interests, and this makes me neither a coward nor a hero.
8. “My interests” neither justify nor discredit anything.
9. “My reasons” are no better than the reasons of others, nor are they worse.
10. Cruelty horrifies me, but neither because of this nor in itself is it better or worse than kindness.
11. What I or others say today is of no value tomorrow.
12. To die is not better than to live or never to have been born, but neither is it worse.
13. I discovered, not through teachings but through experience and meditation, that there is no meaning in life if everything ends with death.

IV. Dependence

The second day:

1. Nothing that I do, feel, or think depends on me.
2. I am mutable and depend on the action of my surroundings. When I want to change my environment or my “I,” it is my environment that ends up changing me. Then I seek the city or nature, social redemption or a new struggle in order to justify my existence. In every case it is my environment that leads me to choose one attitude or another. In this way, my interests and my surroundings leave me here.
3. I say, then, that it does not matter who or what decides. I say on these occasions that I have to live since I am in the situation of living. I say all this, but there is nothing that justifies it. I can make a decision, hesitate, or remain where I am. In any case, one thing is only provisionally better than another; ultimately there is no better or worse.
4. If someone tells me that those who do not eat die, I will answer that this is indeed so, and that, spurred by their needs, they are compelled to eat. But I will not add that the struggle to eat justifies one’s existence—nor will I say that this struggle is bad. I will simply say that all of this concerns an individual or collective fact related to the need for subsistence, but that it has no meaning in the moment that the last battle is lost.
5. I will say, moreover, that I feel solidarity with the struggle of the poor, the exploited, and the persecuted. I will say that I feel “fulfilled” in this identification, but I understand that these feelings do not justify anything.

V. Intimation of Meaning

The third day:

1. At times I have anticipated events that later took place.
2. At times I have grasped a distant thought.
3. At times I have described places I have never been.
4. At times I have recounted exactly what took place in my absence.
5. At times an immense joy has surprised me.
6. At times total comprehension has overwhelmed me.
7. At times a perfect communion with everything has filled me with ecstasy.
8. At times I have broken through my reveries and seen reality in a new way.
9. At times I have seen something for the first time yet recognized it as though I had seen it before.

   And all this has made me think.

   It is clear to me that without these experiences I could not have emerged from the non-meaning.

VI. Sleep and Awakening

The fourth day:

1. I cannot take as real what I see in my dreams, nor what I see in semi-sleep, nor what I see when I am awake but in reverie.
2. I can take as real what I see when I am awake and without reveries. Here I am not speaking of what my senses register, since naive and dubious “data” can arrive from my external and internal senses as well as from my memory. Rather, I am speaking of the activities of my mind as they relate to the “data” being thought. What is valid is that when my mind is awake it “knows” and when it is asleep it “believes.” Only rarely do I perceive reality in a new way, and it is then that I realize that what I normally see resembles sleep or semi-sleep.

There is a real way of being awake, and it has led me to meditate profoundly on all that has been said so far. It has, moreover, opened the door for me to discover the meaning of all that exists.

VII. Presence of the Force

The fifth day:

1. When I was truly awake I scaled from comprehension to comprehension.
2. When I was truly awake yet lacked the strength to continue the ascent, I was able to draw the Force from within myself. This Force was present throughout my body. All of the energy was present even in the smallest cells of my body, and it circulated more rapidly and more intensely than my blood.
3. I discovered that the energy concentrated in certain points of my body when they were active and was absent when they were not.
4. During illness the energy was either lacking or it accumulated precisely in the affected areas of my body. But if I was able to reestablish the normal flow of the energy, many illnesses began to recede.

Some peoples knew this, and through various procedures that seem strange to us today, they were able to reestablish the flow of the energy.

Some peoples knew this, and they were able to communicate this energy to others, producing "illuminations" of comprehension and even physical "miracles."

VIII. Control of the Force

The sixth day:

1. There is a way of directing and concentrating the Force that circulates through the body.
2. In the body are points of control on which depend what we know as movement, emotion, and idea. When the energy acts in these points, it gives rise to motor, emotional, and intellectual manifestations.
3. Depending on whether the energy acts more internally or superficially in the body, the states of deep sleep, semi-sleep, or wakefulness arise. Surely the halos that surround the bodies or heads of the saints (or the great awakened ones) in religious paintings allude to this phenomenon of the energy which, on occasion, manifests more externally.
4. There is a point of control of *being-truly-awake,* and there is a way of bringing the Force to this point.
5. When the energy is led to this point, all the other points of control move in a new way.

Upon understanding this and hurling the Force to this superior point, my entire body felt the impact of an immense energy. This energy struck powerfully within my consciousness, and I ascended from comprehension to comprehension. But I also observed that if I lost control of the energy, I could descend to the depths of the mind. Then I remembered the legends of "heavens" and "hells," and I saw the dividing line between these mental states.

IX. Manifestations of the Energy

The seventh day:

1. This energy in motion could become “independent” of the body yet still maintain its unity.
2. This unified energy was really a sort of “double” of the body, corresponding to the coenesthetic representation of one’s own body within the space of representation. The sciences that deal with mental phenomena have not paid sufficient attention to the existence of this space or to the representations that correspond to the internal sensations of the body.
3. The energy duplicated in this way—that is imagined as if “outside” of the body or “separated” from its material base—either dissolved as an image or was represented correctly, depending on the internal unity of the one carrying out this work.
4. I was able to confirm that the “exteriorization” of this energy—which represented one’s body as “outside” of one’s body—could be produced even from the lowest levels of the mind. In these cases, a threat to the most basic unity of the living being provoked this response in order to safeguard the one who was in danger. That is why, in the trances of some mediums whose level of consciousness was low and whose internal unity was imperiled, these responses occurred involuntarily and were not recognized as being self-produced, but were attributed to other entities.

The “ghosts” of certain peoples, like the “spirits” of some fortunetellers, were nothing but the “doubles” (the self-representations) of those who felt themselves possessed. Having lost control of the Force, their mental state was darkened in trance, and they felt controlled by strange beings who at times produced remarkable phenomena. Doubtless this was the case of many who were said to be “possessed.” What was decisive, then, was control of the Force.

All this changed completely my conception of both daily life and of life after death. Through these thoughts and experiences I began to lose faith in death, and now I no longer believe in it, just as I no longer believe in the non-meaning of life.

X. Evidence of Meaning

The eighth day:

1. The real importance of an awakened life became evident to me.
2. The real importance of eliminating internal contradictions convinced me.
3. The real importance of mastering the Force in order to achieve unity and continuity filled me with joyful meaning.

XI. The Luminous Center

The ninth day:

1. In the Force was “the light” that came from a “center.”
2. In withdrawal from the center there was a dissolution of the energy, while in the unification and evolution of the energy that luminous center was at work.

It did not strike me as strange to find a devotion to the Sun-god among various ancient peoples. And I saw that while some worshipped this heavenly object because it gave life to the earth and to nature, others recognized in that majestic body the symbol of a greater reality.

There were those who went still further and received innumerable gifts from this center, gifts that at times “descended” as tongues of fire over the inspired ones, at times arrived as luminous spheres, and at times appeared as burning bushes before the fearful believer.

XII. The Discoveries

The tenth day:

Few but important were my discoveries, which I summarize this way:

1. Though the Force circulates through the body involuntarily, it can be directed through conscious effort. Achieving an intentional change in the level of consciousness grants the human being an important glimpse of liberation from those “natural” conditions that seem to impose themselves on the consciousness.
2. Within the body are points that control its diverse activities.
3. There are differences between the state of being truly awake and other levels of consciousness.
4. The Force can be led to the point of true awakening (understanding by “Force” the mental energy that accompanies particular images and by “point” the location of such an image in a certain “place” in the space of representation).

These conclusions led me to recognize in the prayers of ancient peoples the seed of a great truth—a truth later obscured by external rites and practices, making it impossible for them to develop that internal work which, realized with perfection, puts human beings in contact with their luminous source.

Finally, I observed that my “discoveries” were not discoveries at all but arose from the inner revelation at which all arrive who, without contradictions, search for the light in their own hearts.

XIII. The Principles

Different is the attitude toward life and things when inner revelation strikes like lightning.

Following the steps slowly, meditating on what has been said and what has yet to be said, you may convert the non-meaning into meaning.

It is not indifferent what you do with your life. Your life, subject to laws, is open to possibilities among which you can choose.

I do not speak to you of liberty. I speak to you of liberation, of movement, of process. I do not speak to you of liberty as something static, but of liberating yourself step by step, as those who approach their city become liberated from the road already traveled. Thus, what-one-must-do does not depend upon distant, incomprehensible, and conventional morals, but upon laws: laws of life, of light, of evolution.

Here are the aforementioned "Principles" that can help you in your search for internal unity:

1. To go against the evolution of things is to go against yourself.
2. When you force something toward an end, you produce the contrary.
3. Do not oppose a great force. Retreat until it weakens, then advance with resolution.
4. Things are well when they move together, not in isolation.
5. If day and night, summer and winter are well with you, you have surpassed the contradictions.
6. If you pursue pleasure, you enchain yourself to suffering. But as long as you do not harm your health, enjoy without inhibition when the opportunity presents itself.
7. If you pursue an end, you enchain yourself. If everything you do is realized as though it were an end in itself, you liberate yourself.
8. You will make your conflicts disappear when you understand them in their ultimate root, not when you want to resolve them.
9. When you harm others you remain enchained, but if you do not harm anyone you can freely do whatever you want.
10. When you treat others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself.
11. It does not matter in which faction events have placed you. What matters is that you comprehend that you have not chosen any faction.
12. Contradictory or unifying actions accumulate within you. If you repeat your acts of internal unity, nothing can detain you.

You will be like a force of Nature when it finds no resistance in its path. Learn to distinguish a difficulty, a problem, an obstacle, from a contradiction. While those may move you or spur you on, contradiction traps you in a closed circle with no way out.

Whenever you find great strength, joy, and kindness in your heart, or when you feel free and without contradictions, immediately be internally thankful. When you find yourself in opposite circumstances, ask with faith, and the gratitude you have accumulated will return to you transformed and amplified in benefit.

XIV. Guide to the Inner Road

If you understand what I have explained so far, you can, through a simple exercise, readily experience the manifestation of the Force.

It is not the same, however, to search for the correct mental position (as if this were a question of approaching a technical task) as it is to enter the kind of emotional tone and openness that poetry inspires.

The language used to transmit these truths, then, is intended to facilitate an attitude that makes it easier to be in the presence of internal perception rather than in the presence of an idea of "internal perception."

Now follow attentively what I will explain to you, because it concerns the inner landscape you may encounter when working with the Force and the directions you can imprint on your mental movements.

On the inner road you may walk darkened or luminous. Attend to the two roads that open before you.

If you let your being cast itself toward dark regions, your body wins the battle and it dominates. Then, sensations and appearances of spirits, of forces, of memories will arise. On this road you descend further and further. Here dwell Hatred, Vengeance, Strangeness, Possession, Jealousy, and the Desire to Remain. Should you descend even further you will be invaded by Frustration, Resentment, and all those dreams and desires that have brought ruin and death upon humanity.

If you impel your being in a luminous direction, you will find resistance and fatigue at every step. There are things to blame for this fatigue in the ascent. Your life weighs; your memories weigh; your previous actions impede the ascent. The climb is made difficult by the action of your body, which tends to dominate.

In the steps of the ascent you will find strange regions of pure colors and unknown sounds.

Do not flee purification, which acts like fire and horrifies with its phantoms.

Reject startling fears and disheartenment.

Reject the desire to flee toward low and dark regions.

Reject the attachment to memories.

Remain in internal liberty, indifferent toward the dream of the landscape, with resolution in the ascent.

The pure light dawns in the summits of the great mountain chains, and the waters-of-a-thousand-colors flow amid unrecognizable melodies toward crystalline plateaus and prairies.

Do not fear the pressure of the light that pushes against you with increasing strength the closer you draw to its center. Absorb it as though it were a liquid or a wind—certainly, in it is life.

When you find the hidden city in the great mountain chain, you must know the entrance—and you will know it in the moment your life is transformed. Its enormous walls are written in figures, are written in colors, are "sensed." In this city are kept the done and the yet-to-be-done. But for your inner eye, the transparent is opaque. Yes, the walls are impenetrable for you!

Take the Force of the hidden city. Return to the world of dense life with your brow and your hands luminous.

XV. The Experience of Peace and the Passage of the Force

1. Completely relax your body and quiet your mind. Then, imagine a transparent and luminous sphere that descends toward you until it comes to rest in your heart. In that moment you will recognize that the sphere ceases to appear as an image and transforms into a sensation within your chest.
2. Observe how the sensation of the sphere slowly expands from your heart toward the outside of your body, while your breathing becomes fuller and deeper. When the sensation reaches the limits of your body, you may stop there and register the experience of internal peace. You may remain there as long as you feel is appropriate. To conclude the exercise, calm and renewed, reverse the previous expansion until arriving, as in the beginning, at your heart, and finally releasing the sphere. This work is called the *experience of peace.*
3. Should you instead wish to experience the *passage of the Force,* you must increase the expansion rather than reversing it, allowing your emotions and your whole being to follow along. Do not try to pay attention to your breathing; let it act by itself while you follow the expansion outward from your body.
4. Let me repeat: Your attention at such moments must be on the sensation of the expanding sphere. If you are unable to achieve this, it is advisable that you stop and try again another time. In any case, even if you do not produce the passage of the Force, you will be able to experience an interesting sensation of peace.
5. If, however, you go further, you will begin to experience the passage of the Force. The sensations from your hands and other areas of your body will have a different tone than usual. Later you may notice increasing undulations, and in a short while vivid images and powerful emotions may arise. Allow the passage to take place…
6. Upon receiving the Force you will, depending upon your habitual mode of representation, perceive the light or strange sounds. In any case, what is important is that you experience an amplification of consciousness, among whose indicators are a greater lucidity and disposition to understand what is taking place.
7. If this singular state has not faded with the passage of time, you can bring it to an end whenever you wish by imagining or feeling that the sphere contracts and then leaves you in the same way it arrived in the beginning.
8. It is interesting to recognize that many altered states of consciousness have been and are almost always achieved through the use of mechanisms similar to those described. These may be disguised, however, by strange rituals, or at times reinforced by practices involving extreme fatigue, unbridled motor activity, repetition, and postures that alter the breathing and distort the general sensation

of the intrabody. In this domain you should also recognize hypnosis, mediumistic activity, and the effects of drugs—all of which, though they act through a different pathway, produce similar alterations. Characteristic of all these cases is an absence of control and a lack of awareness of what is taking place. Do not trust such manifestations, and consider them nothing more than “trances” such as those through which the dabblers, the ignorant, and (according to legend) even the “saints” have passed.

9. Even if you have followed these recommendations, you may still have been unable to produce the passage of the Force. This should not become a source of concern, however—simply take it as an indicator of a lack of internal “letting go,” which may reflect excessive tensions or problems with the dynamics of the images—in sum, a fragmentation of emotional behavior—something that will, moreover, also be present in your daily life.

XVI. Projection of the Force

1. If you have experienced the passage of the Force, you will be able to understand how, based on similar experiences but without understanding, various peoples went on to develop rites and cults that later multiplied endlessly. Through experiences like those previously described there were some who felt that their bodies had “doubled,” and the experience of the Force gave them the sensation that they could project this energy outside themselves.
2. The Force could be “projected” to others and also to objects particularly “suited” to receive and conserve it. I trust it will not be difficult for you to understand the function filled by the sacraments of various religions, as well as the significance of those sacred places and priests supposedly “charged” with the Force. When certain objects were surrounded with ceremonies and rites and worshipped with faith in temples, surely they “gave back” to the believers the energy accumulated through repeated prayer. Since fundamental internal experience is essential to understanding in these matters, attempts at understanding based, as is normally the case, solely on externals, reveal a limitation in our knowledge of human realities—no matter that these externals are culture, geography, history, or tradition.
3. “Projecting,” “charging,” and “replenishing” the Force are subjects to which we will return later. For now let me say that this same mechanism continues to operate even in secular societies where leaders and others imbued with prestige are surrounded by a special kind of aura in the eyes of those who would like to “touch” them, acquire a scrap of their clothing, a fragment of their possessions, or even just to see them.
4. This occurs because all representations of the “heights” extend from eye level upward, above the normal line of sight. And the “higher-ups” are those who “possess” kindness, wisdom, and strength. There, in the “heights” above, we also find the hierarchies, the powers that be, and the flags of State. And we, ordinary mortals, must at all costs “ascend” the social ladder in order to draw closer to power. What a sorry state we are in, still governed by these mechanisms, which coincide with our internal representation in which our heads are in the “heights” and our feet stuck on the ground. What an unhappy state we are in, when we believe in these things, and believe in them because they have their own “reality” in our internal representation. What a sorry state we are in, when our *external look* is nothing but an unacknowledged projection of the internal.

XVII. Loss and Repression of the Force

1. The greatest discharges of energy occur through uncontrolled acts, including unbridled imagination, unchecked curiosity, immoderate small talk, excessive sexuality, and exaggerated perception—looking, listening, tasting, and so on in an aimless and excessive manner. But you should also recognize that many act in these ways because it allows them to discharge tensions that would otherwise be painful. All things considered, and given the function served by these discharges, I am sure you will agree with me that it is not reasonable to repress them but rather to give order to them.
2. As for sexuality, you must interpret this correctly: This function must not be repressed because that will only cause torment and internal contradiction. Sexuality directs itself toward and concludes in the act itself, and it is not useful that it continues affecting the imagination or obsessively searching for a new object of possession.
3. The control of sex by a particular social or religious “morality” has served purposes that had nothing to do with evolution, but the contrary.
4. In repressed societies the Force (the energy of the representation of the sensation of the intrabody) turned back toward the crepuscular. In those societies, cases increased of the “possessed,” of “witches,” of the sacrilegious, and of criminals of all kinds who rejoiced in suffering and the destruction of life and beauty. In some tribes and civilizations the criminals were to be found among both the accusers and the accused. In other cases all that was science and progress was persecuted because it opposed the irrational, the crepuscular, and the repressed.
5. The repression of sex still exists among certain so-called “primitive peoples,” just as it does in other civilizations that some consider “advanced.” It is evident that although the origins of these two situations may differ, both are marked by great destructiveness.
6. If you ask me to explain further, I will tell you that in reality sex is sacred, and it is the center from which all life and creativity springs, just as it is from there that all destruction arises when issues about its functioning are not resolved.
7. Never believe the lies of the poisoners of life when they refer to sex as despicable. On the contrary, in it is beauty, and not in vain is it related to the best feelings of love.
8. Be careful, then, and consider sex a great wonder, which must be treated with care, without turning it into a source of contradiction or a disintegrator of vital energy.

XVIII. Action and Reaction of the Force

Earlier I explained to you: "Whenever you find great strength, joy, and kindness in your heart, or when you feel free and without contradictions, immediately be internally thankful."

1. "To be thankful" means to concentrate these positive moods and associate them with an image, with a representation. If you have previously linked positive states in this way, you can, upon finding yourself in a difficult situation, evoke that representation, and along with it will arise the positive quality that accompanied it earlier. Furthermore, since this mental "charge" has been increased through previous repetitions, it is capable of displacing the negative emotions that certain situations impose.
2. Thus, whatever you ask for will return from within you amplified in benefit—as long as you have accumulated within yourself numerous positive states. By now it should be unnecessary to repeat that this mechanism has long been used (though in confused ways) to "charge" external objects or persons or to externalize internal entities, believing that they would respond to prayers and supplication.

XIX. The Internal States

You must now gain sufficient insight into the various internal states you may find yourself in throughout the course of your life, and particularly in the course of your evolutionary work. I have no way to describe these states except by using images, in this case allegorical ones. These seem to me to have the virtue of "visually" concentrating complex states and moods. The unusual approach of linking these states to one another as if they were distinct moments in a single process introduces a departure from the typically fragmented descriptions we have become accustomed to from those who normally deal with such things.

1. As I mentioned earlier, in the first state, known as *Diffuse Vitality,* non-meaning prevails. Here, everything is oriented by physical needs, though these are often confused with contradictory images and desires. Here, both motives and all that is done are shrouded in darkness. In this state you simply vegetate, lost among changing forms. From this point you can evolve only by following one of two paths: the way of *Death* or the way of *Mutation*.
2. The path of Death puts you in the presence of a dark and chaotic landscape. The ancients knew this passage and almost always located it "underground" or in the depths of the abyss. There are those who visited this kingdom, to later "resurrect" in luminous levels. Understand well that "below" Death lies Diffuse Vitality. Perhaps the human mind relates mortal disintegration to subsequent phenomena of transformation; perhaps it associates this diffuse movement with what takes place before birth. If your direction is that of ascent, Death signifies a break with your former stage. By taking the path of Death you ascend to another state.
3. Arriving here you find yourself at the refuge of *Regression.* Two ways open from here: One is the road of *Repentance;* the other, which you used for the ascent, is the road of Death. If you take the first road it is because your decision tends to break with your past life. If you go back along the road of Death you will fall again into the depths, with the sensation of being trapped in a closed circle.
4. Earlier I told you that there is another path you might take to escape from the abyss of Vitality: it is the path of Mutation. If you choose this road it is because you wish to emerge from your unhappy state, but are unwilling to abandon some of its apparent benefits. It is, then, a false road known as the "Twisted Hand." Many are the monsters who have emerged from the depths through this tortuous passageway. They have wanted to storm the heavens without abandoning the hells, and consequently have projected infinite contradiction into the middle world.
5. Let us suppose that by ascending from the kingdom of Death and through your conscious Repentance, you have now reached the dwelling of *Tendency.* Two narrow supports, *Conservation* and *Frustration,* maintain your dwelling.

Conservation is false and unstable; walking along this path you delude yourself with the idea of permanence, but in reality you descend rapidly. Should you take the path of Frustration, your ascent is arduous, but this path is the *only-one-not-false.*

6. After failure upon failure you can reach the next resting place, called the dwelling of *Deviation*. Take care in choosing between the two roads now before you. Either you take the road of *Resolution,* which carries you to *Generation,* or you take that of Resentment*,* which causes you to descend once more toward Regression*.* Here you face another dilemma: Either you choose the labyrinth of conscious life with Resolution, or you return to your previous life through Resentment. There are many who, at this point, unable to surpass themselves, cut off their own possibilities.
7. But you who have ascended with Resolution now find yourselves at the dwelling known as Generation*.* Here you face three doors: one called the *Fall,* another known as *Intent,* and the third called *Degradation.* The Fall carries you directly to the depths, and only an external accident can push you toward it; it is unlikely that you would choose that door. The door of Degradation, however, carries you indirectly to the abyss. On this path you retrace your steps in a sort of turbulent spiral in which you continually reconsider all that you have lost and all that you have sacrificed. This examination of consciousness that leads you to Degradation is surely a false examination in which you underestimate and evaluate disproportionately some of what you are comparing. You compare the effort of the ascent with those “benefits” you have left behind. But if you examine things more closely, you will see that you have not abandoned anything for the ascent, but rather for other reasons. Degradation begins, then, when you misrepresent those motives that were not really related to the ascent. I ask you now: What betrays the mind? Perhaps it is the false motives of initial enthusiasm? Perhaps it is the difficulty of the undertaking? Perhaps it is the false memories of sacrifices that never were, or that were made for other reasons? Saying this I ask you now: Some time ago your house burned down, and because it did you chose the ascent; or do you now think that because of this ascent, your house burned down? Have you perhaps noticed what has happened to the houses around you? There is no doubt that you must choose the middle door, that of Intent.
8. Climbing the stairway of Intent you will reach an unstable dome. From there, take the narrow, winding passageway known as *Volubility* until you reach a vast and empty space like a platform, which bears the name *Open-Space-of-the-Energy.*
9. In that open space you may be frightened by the immense, deserted landscape and the terrifying silence of this night, transfigured by enormous and immobile stars. There, directly over your head, you will see set in the firmament the suggestive form of the *Black Moon*, a strange, eclipsed moon located exactly opposite the Sun. Here you must await the dawn patiently and with faith, for nothing bad can happen if you remain calm.

10. You may, upon finding yourself in this situation, want to arrange an immediate way out. However, should you try to leave instead of prudently awaiting the day, you could end up blindly groping your way anywhere. Remember that all movement here (in the darkness) is false and is generically called *Improvisation.* If, forgetting what I tell you now, you begin to improvise movements, be certain that you will be dragged by a whirlwind down paths and past dwellings to the darkest depths of Dissolution.
11. How difficult it is to comprehend that the internal states are linked one to another! If you could see what inflexible logic the consciousness has, you would recognize that those who blindly improvise in this situation inevitably begin to degrade themselves and others. Then, feelings of Frustration arise in them, and later they fall into Resentment and finally into Death—forgetting all that they had at one moment managed to perceive.
12. If, in that open space, you manage to reach the day, the radiant Sun will rise before your eyes, illuminating reality for the first time. Then you will see that in everything that exists there lives a *Plan*.
13. It is unlikely that you will fall from here unless you should voluntarily choose to descend to obscure regions in order to carry the light into the darkness.

It would not be useful to develop these subjects further, because without experience they can only mislead by transferring to the field of the imaginary something that can actually be achieved.

May what has been said here be of service to you. If you do not find what has been explained here useful, to what could you object, since for skepticism nothing has any basis or reason—it is like the image in a mirror, the sound of an echo, the shadow of a shadow.

XX. Internal Reality

1. Take note of my considerations. In them you will not only intuit allegorical phenomena and landscapes of the external world, but you will also find true descriptions of the mental world.
2. Nor should you believe that the “places” through which you pass in your journey have some sort of independent existence. Such confusion has often obscured profound teachings, and even today there are some who believe that the heavens, hells, angels, devils, monsters, enchanted castles, distant cities, and the rest have visible reality for the “enlightened.” The same prejudice, but with the opposite interpretation, has been maintained by skeptics without wisdom who take these things to be simply “illusions” or “hallucinations” suffered by feverish minds.
3. I must repeat, then: You should understand that all this deals with real mental states, even though they are symbolized here by objects that correspond to the external world.
4. Remember what I have said, and learn to dis-cover the truth behind the allegories, which on occasion lead the mind astray, but at other times translate realities that would be impossible to grasp without such representation.

When they spoke of a city of the gods, which the heroes of many peoples strove to reach; when they spoke of a paradise where gods and humankind lived together in transfigured original nature; when they spoke of falls and floods, great internal truth was told.

Later, the redeemers brought their messages and came to us in double nature to reestablish that lost unity for which we yearned. Then, too, great inner truth was told.

But when all this was spoken of but set outside the mind, it was an error or a lie.

Conversely, the fusing of the inner look with the external world forces this look to travel new paths.

The heroes of this age fly through regions previously unknown toward the stars.

The heroes of this age fly outward from their world and, without knowing it, they are impelled toward the internal and luminous center.

The Internal Landscape

I. The Question

1. Here is my question: As life goes by, is it happiness or suffering that grows within you? Do not ask that I define these words; answer instead according to what you feel…
2. Though you may be wise and powerful, if happiness and liberty do not grow in you and in those around you, I will reject your example.
3. Accept, instead, my proposal: Follow the model of that which is being born, not that which takes the path toward death. Leap over your suffering, and it will not be the abyss but life that grows within you.
4. There is no passion, idea, or human deed that is not linked to the abyss. Therefore, let us turn to the only thing that deserves our attention: the abyss and that which overcomes it.

II. Reality

1. What is it that you want? If you answer that it is love or security that is most important, then you are speaking of moods—of things that you cannot see.
2. If you reply that it is money, power, social recognition, a just cause, God, or eternity that is most important, then you are speaking of something that you see or you imagine.
3. We will be in agreement when you say, “I choose this just cause because I reject suffering! I want *this* because it brings me tranquillity, and I reject *that* because it disturbs me or makes me violent.”
4. Is your mood, then, at the center of all aspiration, all intention, all affirmation, and all denial? You might reply that whether you are sad or joyful, a number remains the same, and that the sun would be the sun even if human beings did not exist.
5. I will tell you that the same number differs depending on whether it is something that you have to give or to receive, and that the sun fills greater space within the human being than in the heavens.
6. The radiance of a spark or of a star dances for your eye. And though there is no light without the eye, on other eyes this radiance would fall with different effect.
7. Therefore let your heart affirm, “I love this radiance I see!” But may it never say, “Neither sun, nor spark, nor star have anything to do with me.”
8. Of what reality do you speak to fish or reptile; to gigantic animal, tiny insect, or bird; to a child or an old person; to one who sleeps or one who keeps watch in cold calculation or feverish terror?
9. I say that the echo of the real murmurs or resounds according to the ear that hears, and that for other ears what you call “reality” would play a different song.
10. Therefore let your heart affirm, “I love the reality that I build!”

III. The External Landscape

Look at this couple slowly walking. While his arm gently encircles her waist, she rests her head softly on his welcoming shoulder. They stroll on while the autumn of leaves that fall around them is crackling and dying in yellows, reds, and violets. Young and beautiful, they continue, inevitably, into the gray overcast afternoon. A cold drizzle begins to fall on the children's toys, abandoned in deserted gardens.

1. For some this scene revives a gentle and perhaps pleasant nostalgia. For others it awakens dreams, and for still others, promises to be fulfilled in radiant days to come. Before the same sea one person becomes anguished, while another, inspired, feels exhilarated. And a thousand more are overawed in contemplation of those frozen crags, while still others gaze in admiration at those crystals carved on such gigantic scale. Some are depressed, others uplifted before the same landscape.
2. A single landscape, then, may be very different for two people, but wherein does the difference lie?
3. The same occurs with what we see or hear. Consider, for example, the word "future." It sets one person on edge, while another remains indifferent, and still others would sacrifice their "today" for it.
4. Consider for example, music, or words with social or religious significance.
5. There are moments when a multitude or an entire nation will condemn or embrace a certain landscape. But does that rejection or acceptance lie in the landscape or in the hearts of that multitude or nation?
6. Between doubt and hope, your life is oriented toward landscapes that coincide with something that is within you.
7. This entire world, which you have not chosen but which has been given for you to humanize, is the landscape that most grows as life grows. Therefore may your heart never say, "Neither the autumn, nor the sea, nor the ice-covered crag have anything to do with me." Instead may it affirm, "I love the reality that I build!"

IV. The Human Landscape

If even the most distant star is connected to you, what should I think of the living landscape, where deer slip between ancient trees and even the most savage animals gently lick their offspring? What should I think of the human landscape, where opulence and misery are found side by side, where some children laugh while others cannot even find the strength to cry?

1. For if you say, “We have reached other planets,” you must also declare, “We have massacred and enslaved entire peoples. We have filled our jails with those who cried out for liberty. We have lied from morning until night. We have falsified our thoughts, our affections, and our actions. We have assaulted life at every turn, for we have created suffering.”
2. I know my way in this human landscape, but what will happen if we pass each other going in opposite directions? I renounce every faction that proclaims an ideal higher than life and every cause that, to impose itself, generates suffering. So before you accuse me of not being part of any faction, examine your own hands—you may find on them the blood of complicity. If you believe it valiant to commit yourself to those factions, what will you say of one whom all the murderous bands accuse of being uncommitted? I want a cause worthy of the human landscape: a cause committed to surpassing pain and suffering.
3. I deny the right to make accusations to any faction that, whether recently or long ago, has figured in the suppression of life.
4. I deny the right to cast suspicion on others to any who conceal their own suspicious faces.
5. I deny that anyone, even someone arguing the extreme urgency of present circumstance, has the right to block the new roads that the human being must travel.
6. Not even the worst of what is criminal is foreign to me, and if I recognize it in the landscape, I recognize it also in myself. So it is that I want to surpass what in me as in everyone fights to suppress life: I want to surpass the abyss!

All worlds you aspire to, all justice you demand, all love you search for, all human beings you would follow or destroy are also within you. Everything that changes within you will change your direction in the landscape you inhabit. Thus, if you have need of something new, you must surpass the old that dominates within you.

And how will you do this?

Begin by realizing that even if you change your location, you carry your internal landscape with you.

V. The Internal Landscape

1. You search for what you believe will make you happy. This may not, however, be the same as what another is searching for. It might happen that you both desire things that are in some sense opposed, and you may both come to believe that the happiness of one opposes the happiness of the other. Or you may both long for the same thing, and if this thing is unique or scarce, you may again come to believe that the happiness of one opposes the happiness of the other.
2. It seems, then, that you can argue over the same object as much as over objects opposed to one another. What a strange logic beliefs have, that they are capable of producing similar behavior toward both an object and its opposite!
3. There, in the heart of your beliefs, lies the key to what you do. So powerful is your fascination with what you believe that you affirm its reality, even though it exists only in your mind.
4. But returning to our theme: You search for what you believe will make you happy. What you believe about things, however, does not reside in the things themselves but in your internal landscape. Gazing at this flower, you and I may agree on many things. But if you go on to say that this flower will bring you utmost happiness, it may become more difficult for me to comprehend, for you are speaking no longer of the flower but instead of what you believe it will do within you. You speak of an internal landscape that perhaps does not coincide with mine. It would be but one more step for you to try to impose your landscape on me. Consider well the consequences that could follow from such a deed.
5. Clearly, your internal landscape is not only what you believe about things, but also what you remember, what you feel, and what you imagine about yourself and others, about facts, about values, about the world in general. Perhaps we can now understand how: External landscape is what we perceive of things, while internal landscape is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world. These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality.

VI. Center and Reflection

"External landscape is what we perceive of things, while internal landscape is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world. These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality." And it is by this vision that we orient ourselves in one direction or another.

1. Yet it is clear that as you go forward your vision is modified.
2. There is no learning, however small, that you achieve through contemplation alone. You learn because you do something with that which you contemplate. And the more you do the more you learn, for as you go forward your vision continues to change.
3. What have you learned of the world? You have learned what you have done. What is it that you want of the world? You have come to want according to what has happened to you. What is it that you do not want from the world? What you do not want also follows from what has happened to you.
4. Hear me, rider galloping astride time: There are three paths by which you can reach your most profound landscape. And what will you find within? Place yourself in the center of your internal landscape and you will see that every direction reflects this center.
5. Surrounded by a triangular wall of mirrors, your landscape is reflected infinitely in infinite hues. There, depending on how you orient your vision on the path of images that you have chosen, all movement is transformed and then restored, time and again. You can come to see your own back in front of you, and when you move your hand to the right, it will respond to the left.
6. If you aspire to reach something in the mirror of the future, you will see how, in the mirror of today or of the past, it runs in the opposite direction.
7. O rider galloping astride time, what is your body but time itself?

VII. Pain, Suffering, and Meaning in Life

1. Hunger, thirst, sickness, and all bodily injury are pain. Fear, frustration, despair, and all mental hurt are suffering. Physical pain recedes in the measure that society and science advance. Mental suffering recedes in the measure that faith in life advances, in the measure that life gains meaning.
2. If, perhaps, you imagine yourself to be a fleeting meteorite that has lost its brilliance upon falling to earth, you will accept that pain and suffering are simply the nature of things. But if you believe you have been thrown into this world to fulfill the mission of humanizing it, you will be thankful to those who have come before you, who have built with great labor the steps that allow you to continue the ascent.
3. Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.
4. I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.
5. I cannot ask you to go further, but neither should it offend if I declare, “Love the reality you build, and not even death will halt your flight!”
6. You will not fulfill your mission if you do not apply your energies to vanquishing pain and suffering in those around you. And if through your action they in turn take up the task of humanizing the world, you will have opened their destiny toward a new life.

VIII. The Rider and His Shadow

As the sun tinted the path red and the shadow of the rider lengthened along the rocks and thick underbrush, he slowed his pace until at last he stopped by a newly lit fire. An old man, rubbing his hands at the flames, greeted him. The rider dismounted and they spoke together for a time. Then the rider continued on his way.

When the shadow of the rider shortened and fell beneath the horse's hooves, he halted for a moment to speak with a man who hailed him from the side of the road.

The rider did not slow his pace as the shadow grew long behind him, and a young man who wanted to stop him was only able to shout, "You're going the wrong way!"

Finally, nightfall caused the rider to dismount, and he saw the shadow only in his soul. Then, sighing to himself and to the stars, he said:

"On a single day an old man spoke to me of loneliness, sickness, and death. A middle-aged man spoke to me of the way things are and the realities of life. And finally, I came upon a youth who did not even speak to me but only shouted out, trying to alter my course to an unknown direction.

"The old man feared losing his things and his life. The middle-aged man feared he would not be able to gain what he believed were his things and his life. The youth feared being unable to escape from his things and his life.

"Strange encounters these, where the old man suffers for his short future, seeking refuge in his long past; the middle-aged man suffers for his present situation, seeking refuge in what has happened or what will happen, depending on whether he grasps before or behind him; and the youth suffers because his short past nips at his heels, spurring on his flight toward a long future.

"And yet I recognize my own face in the faces of all three, and it seems to me that all human beings, whatever their age, can move through these times and see in them phantoms that do not exist. Or does that offense of my youth still exist today? Does my coming old age exist today? Does my death already dwell here today in this darkness?

"All suffering steals in through memory, imagination, or perception. But it is thanks to these same three pathways that thoughts, affections, and human deeds exist. So it is that even while these pathways are necessary for life, if suffering contaminates them they also become channels of destruction.

"Yet is not suffering the warning that life gives us when its flow is inverted?

"Life can be inverted by something that is done with it, perhaps unwittingly. And so it is that the old man, the middle-aged man, and the youth must have done something with their lives for them to have become 'inverted.'"

Then the rider, meditating in the darkness of the night, fell asleep. And upon sleeping he dreamt, and in his dreams the landscape became illuminated.

He found himself in the center of a triangular space walled with mirrors. The mirrors reflected his image, multiplying it. Choosing one direction he saw himself as an old man. Choosing another his face was that of a middle-aged man, and in a third that of a youth. But in the center of himself, he felt like a child.

Then everything began to grow dark, and when he could distinguish nothing but a heavy darkness, he awoke.

On opening his eyes he saw the light of the sun. Then he mounted his horse, and seeing his shadow growing longer, he said to himself, "Contradiction inverts life and generates suffering… The sun hides itself so that day becomes night, but the day will be according to what I do with it."

IX. Contradiction and Unity

1. Contradiction inverts life. The inversion of the growing stream of life is experienced as suffering. Thus, suffering is the signal that warns us of the need to change the direction of the opposing forces.
2. Those who through repeated frustration find themselves detained on their way only appear to be detained; in reality, they regress. Time and again their past failures close off their future. Those who feel frustrated see the future as a repetition of the past, even as they experience the need to distance themselves from that past.
3. Those who seize the future a prey to resentment, what intricate retaliation will they not attempt in order to avenge their past?
4. And in their frustration and resentment they do violence to the future, until it bends its back in suffering return.
5. At times, wise men have recommended love as a protective shield against the blows of suffering. But this deceptive word “love,” what does it mean to you? Does it mean getting even for the past, or instead a fresh, new, untainted adventure launched toward an unknown future?
6. Just as I have seen solemnity grotesquely cloak the ridiculous, just as I have seen an empty seriousness cast its pall over the grace of talent, so have I recognized in many loves a vindictive self-affirmation.
7. What image have you of the wise? Is it not true that you conceive of them as solemn beings, slow of gesture; as beings who have suffered enormously and with this merit beckon you from on high with gentle phrases in which they repeat the word “love?”
8. I have seen in all the truly wise a child running playfully through the world of ideas and things, creating generous and brilliant bubbles, only to burst them. In the sparkling eyes of all who are truly wise I have seen “the light feet of joy, dancing toward the future.” And very seldom have I heard them utter the word “love,” for the truly wise never promise in vain.
9. Do not believe that you will purify your suffering past through revenge, or by using “love” as an incantation or as the bait for a new trap.
10. You will truly love only when you build with your gaze fixed on the future. And if you remember a great love that is no more, let the memory be accompanied by a soft and silent nostalgia, with gratitude for all it has taught you until today.
11. You will not break with your past suffering by falsifying or degrading the future. You will break with it only by changing the direction of the forces that provoke contradiction in you.
12. I believe you will know how to distinguish a difficulty, which is welcome for you can leap over it, from a contradiction, that lonely labyrinth that has no exit.

13. Every contradictory action that you have done in your life, whatever the circumstances, has the unequivocal flavor of internal violence and betrayal of yourself. Why you found yourself in that situation will not matter, but only how—at that precise moment—you organized your reality, your landscape. Something shattered then, and changed your direction. And this, in turn, predisposed you to a new rupture. In this way, all contradictory actions orient you toward repeating them, just as all unitive actions seek to reemerge later on.
14. In daily actions difficulties are overcome, small objectives are achieved, little failures reaped. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, these acts accompany daily life like scaffolding accompanies a great building; it is not the structure itself, but it is necessary if it is to be built. It does not matter what material this scaffolding is made of, as long as it is suitable for its purpose.
15. As for the building itself, where you put defective material, the defect will grow; where you put solid material, you increase the structure's solidity.
16. The essential construction of your life is built of contradictory or unifying actions. You must make no mistake at the moment you find yourself faced with your actions, for if you do you will jeopardize your future and invert the stream of your life—and how then will you end your suffering?
17. But it happens that at this very moment your contradictory actions are already many. And if everything from the foundation up is false, what can be done? Would you pull your whole life apart to begin anew? Let me tell you that I do not believe that everything you have built is false, and you should abandon any such drastic thoughts. They will only bring you greater misfortune than is already yours today.
18. A new life is not based upon destroying previous "sins" but upon recognizing them, so that from now on it will be clear how ill-advised are these mistakes.
19. A life begins when unifying actions start to multiply, so that by their virtue they compensate and finally favorably overbalance the previous relationship of forces.
20. You must be very clear about this: You are not at war with yourself. Rather, you must begin treating yourself like an old friend with whom you must now reconcile, for ignorance and life itself have driven you apart.
21. You must begin by making a decision to reconcile with yourself and to understand your previous contradictions. Then you need to make another decision—that you want to overcome these contradictions. Finally, you need to decide to build your life with acts of unity, rejecting those materials that until now have brought so much harm down upon your head.
22. Indeed, it is advisable that you clarify—in both your past and present situations—those contradictory acts that truly imprison you. To recognize them, you can rely on the suffering that is accompanied by internal violence and the sensation that you have betrayed yourself. These actions give clear signals.
23. I am not saying that you should mortify yourself in exhaustively recounting the present and the past. I am simply recommending that you consider everything

that has changed your course in an unhappy direction and everything that keeps you fettered and tightly bound. Do not fool yourself once more by saying, “I have overcome these problems!” Nothing has been overcome or sufficiently understood that has not been weighed against a new force that compensates for and overcomes the previous influence.

24. All these suggestions will be of value if you are prepared to create a new landscape in your internal world. But you will be able to do nothing for yourself if you think only of yourself. If you want to move forward, you will one day have to accept that your mission is to humanize the world around you.
25. If you want to build a new life, free of contradictions, a life that increasingly overcomes suffering, you must be aware of two false arguments. The first holds that “I need to solve my personal problems before I can undertake any constructive action in the world.” The second leads you to declare “I am committed to the world!” while forgetting yourself completely.
26. You may agree with me or not, but in any case I will affirm that this is the only way forward: If you want to grow, you will help those around you to grow.

X. Valid Action

1. Contradiction is not the only source of mental harm; any reversal of the growing stream of life is experienced as suffering. Yet while the empire of circumstance may allow many forms of suffering to be overcome, contradiction persists, weaving its dark web of shadows.
2. Who has not suffered the loss of affection, of images, of objects? Who has not feared, been desperate, felt pity, or become agitated in angry rebellion against people, against nature, against all those unwanted but inevitable endings? But what was feared in darkness faded with the coming of day, and much of what was lost was forgotten. Yet that innermost betrayal of oneself continues in the past and poisons the future.
3. That which is most important in human life is constructed with materials of unity or contradiction. And this is the deep memory that either continues projecting existence beyond all apparent limit or causes it to disintegrate precisely at this threshold. May all human beings in their final review find remembrance of their internal unity!
4. And what is the flavor of an act of unity? If you would recognize it, rely on that profound peace which, accompanied by a gentle joy, leads you into agreement with yourself. This act bears the sign of the most integral truth, for in it, thought, feeling, and action in the world are united in the most intimate friendship. Yes, valid action is unmistakable; you would affirm it a thousand times over should you live as many lives!
5. Every phenomenon that makes suffering recede in others is registered as a valid action, as an act of unity, in the one who carries it out.
6. All action is bounded by two tendencies: There is the abyss, which grows through contradiction, and the flight above that allows you to overcome it through valid action.
7. And the cord of life takes on its singular modulation as it loosens or tightens, until reaching the note aspired to. There must be one note and one adjustment and one special procedure so that the vibration builds and resounds in a suitable way.
8. Babbling at human beings as they came to stand erect in their landscape, the moralities of the nations indicated the “yes” and the “no” of actions, upholding the “good” and persecuting the “bad.” But will this “good” continue to be good in a landscape that is so diverse? If an immutable God affirms it, it will be so; but if for many God has disappeared, who is left to judge? For the law changes with the opinion of the times.
9. Here is the point: Will those *principles of valid action* that allow all human beings to live in internal unity be static images that must be obeyed, or will they

correspond instead to what one experiences when one rejects or follows those principles?

10. We will not discuss here the nature of those principles of valid action; we will simply take into account the need for their existence.

XI. Projection of the Internal Landscape

We have spoken of landscapes, of suffering, of contradiction, and of those actions that give unity to the stream of life. One could believe that all of this remains enclosed in the interior of each human being, or if it has any external expression, it is only in the form of individual actions that have no further consequences. However, things are precisely the opposite.

1. Contradiction inverts life, jeopardizing not only the future of the one who suffers it but also of all those in contact with this person, who has now become a transmitter of misfortune. All personal contradiction contaminates the immediate human landscape like an invisible sickness, detectable only through its effects.
2. Long ago, the plagues that befell a region were blamed on witches and demons. But over time, the advance of science did more for both the persecutors and the persecuted than all the millennia of irresponsible clamor. To which faction would you have given your support? Whether on the side of the pure or the wicked, you would only have increased your folly.
3. Even today, when you search for culprits on whom to blame your misfortunes, you simply add to the long chain of superstition. Reflect, therefore, before pointing your finger, for perhaps it was accident or the projection of your own contradictions that has provoked these unhappy endings.
4. That your children orient themselves in a direction opposed to your designs has more to do with you than with your neighbor, and more to do with you, certainly, than with an earthquake in some distant latitude.
5. Should your influence, then, reach an entire people, take great care to overcome your own contradiction so as not to poison with it the air that all others must breathe. You will be responsible for yourself and for all those you gather around you.
6. Thus, if your mission is to humanize the earth, strengthen your hands, hands of a noble laborer.

XII. Compensation, Reflection, and the Future

1. Hunger dreams of satiety, the imprisoned yearn for freedom, pain longs for pleasure, and pleasure wearies of itself. Could it be that life is nothing more than action and reaction?
2. If life is but pursuit of security for those who fear the future, self-affirmation for the disoriented, the desire for revenge for those frustrated with the past—what liberty, what responsibility, what commitment can be held aloft as an unvanquished banner?
3. And if life is but a mirror that reflects a landscape, how will it ever change that which it reflects?
4. Between the cold mechanics of pendulums and the phantasmal optics of mirrors, what do you affirm that you can affirm without denying? What do you affirm without regressing or with more than arithmetic repetition?
5. If you affirm that which searches for itself and whose nature is to transform itself, that which is never complete in itself and whose essence opens to the future, then you love the reality you build. This, then, is your life: the reality that you build!
6. And there will be action and reaction, as there will be reflection and accident. But if you have opened the future, there will be nothing that can detain you.
7. May life speak through your mouth, and may it say, “There is nothing that can detain me!”
8. Oh useless and wicked prophecy that proclaims the end of the world. I affirm that the human being shall not only continue to live but shall grow without limit. And I say, moreover, that the deniers of life wish to steal all hope—that beating heart of human action.
9. In the darkest moments, may your future joy remind you of these words: “Life searches for growth, not for the compensation of nothingness!”

XIII. Provisional Meanings

1. When moved by the pendulum of compensation, I search for meanings to justify my existence, directing myself toward what I need or what I believe I need. In either case, and whether I reach my objective or not, how will that affect the meaning of my life, inasmuch as it is movement in a given direction?
2. If I define myself by a particular situation, what will happen when, through some accident, that situation falls apart? These provisional meanings, though necessary for the development of human activities, cannot serve as the foundation for my existence.
3. Unless you wish to reduce existence to nothing more than exhaustion or frustration, you will need to discover a meaning that not even death—were that the accident—could exhaust or frustrate.
4. You will not be able to justify existence if you place as its end the absurdity of death. Until now, you and I have been companions in the struggle. Neither you nor I wished to kneel before any god, and that is how I would like to remember you always. Why, then, do you abandon me, even as I set forth to defy inexorable death? How is it possible that we have said, “Not even the gods are above life!”—and now you kneel before the denial of life? Do as you see fit, but I will bow my head before no idol, even when it is supposedly “justified” by faith in reason.
5. If reason is to be at the service of life, it will help us leap over death. Let reason, then, produce a meaning exempt from all frustration, all exhaustion, all accident.
6. I want no one at my side who projects transcendence out of fear, but only those who rise up in rebellion against the inevitability of death.
7. I want those saints who do not fear but truly love. I want those who day by day seek to conquer pain and suffering with their science and their reason. And in truth I see no difference between the saints and those who, through their science, encourage life. What better examples could there be, what guides superior to these?
8. A meaning that seeks to go beyond the provisional will not accept death as the end of life, but will instead affirm transcendence as the maximum disobedience to this apparent Destiny. As for those who affirm that their actions unleash events that continue in others, they hold in their hands a strand of eternity’s thread.

XIV. Faith

1. Whenever I hear the word “faith,” I feel suspicion grow within me.
2. Every time someone speaks of “faith,” I wonder about the purpose of what they are saying.
3. I have seen the difference between naive faith (also known as “credulity”), and the violent and unjustified faith that gives rise to fanaticism. Neither is acceptable, for the first opens the door to accident, while the second imposes its feverish landscape.
4. But something important must lie in this tremendous force that is capable of mobilizing the best of causes. Let faith, then, be a belief whose foundation rests on its usefulness for life!
5. If it is said that faith and science oppose each other, I will reply that I accept science as long as it does not oppose life.
6. Nothing prevents faith and science from progressing, as long as they have the same direction and enthusiasm to help sustain the effort.
7. And those who would humanize, let them help raise our spirits by pointing out the possibilities that the future holds. Or is the skeptic’s anticipation of defeat useful for life? Could even science be sustained without faith?
8. There is a type of faith that goes against life. It is a faith that proclaims “Science will destroy our world!” How much better to put our faith in working day by day to humanize science, so that the direction it was endowed with from its birth may triumph!
9. The usefulness of faith is evident if it is a faith that opens the future and gives meaning to life, orienting it away from suffering and contradiction and toward everything that is valid action.
10. That faith, like faith placed in oneself, in others, and in the world around us, is useful for life.
11. In saying “Faith is useful” you will doubtless offend some particularly sensitive ears. But do not worry, for if those musicians simply examine themselves a little they will recognize how faith is also useful to them, though their faith may flow from a different instrument than the one you play.
12. All those problems that until now have seemed insurmountable will begin to diminish if you are able to achieve faith in yourself and the best in those around you, faith in our world and in a life that is always open to the future.

XV. To Give and To Receive

1. Let us look at the relationship you establish with your external landscape. It may be that you consider all objects, people, values, and affections as things presented for you to choose among and devour according to your own particular appetites. It is likely that this centripetal vision of the world denotes a contraction that reaches from your thoughts to your muscles.
2. If this is the case, it is certain that you will have the highest regard for everything that is related to you—your sufferings as much as your pleasures. It is doubtful that you will even want to surpass your personal problems, because in them you will recognize a tone that is, above all, your own. From your thoughts to your muscles, everything has been taught to contract, not to let go. Hence, even when you act with generosity, calculation motivates your apparent disinterestedness.
3. Everything enters and nothing leaves, and from your thoughts down to your muscles everything becomes intoxicated.
4. And having contaminated all those around you, how can you later reproach them for their “ingratitude” toward you?
5. If we speak of “giving” and “helping,” you think of what others can give you, of how they can help you. But the best help that could be given you would consist of teaching you to let go of your contraction.
6. I tell you that your selfishness is not a sin but rather the fundamental error in your calculation, for you have naively believed that to receive is better than to give.
7. Remember the best moments in your life and you will recognize that they were invariably accompanied by a disinterested giving. Reflecting on this should by itself be enough to change the direction of your existence—but it will not suffice.
8. Let us hope I have been speaking of someone else and not of you, since surely you have understood such sayings as “humanize the earth,” “open the future,” and “overcome suffering in the world around you,” all of which are based on the capacity to give.
9. “To love the reality that you are building” does not mean to place the solution to your own problems as the key to the world.
10. Let me end by saying: If you want to overcome your profound contradiction, you must produce valid actions. If these actions are valid, it is because they help those around you.

XVI. Models

1. In your internal landscape there is an ideal man or woman that you search for in the external landscape. Through so many relationships your ideal remains always just out of reach—like two fragments of flint that do not quite strike except for that brief moment when perfect love dazzles us with its spark.
2. All human beings, in their own ways, launch their lives toward the external landscape, seeking to complete their hidden models.
3. But the external landscape continues imposing its own laws, and as time goes by, your once most cherished dream becomes only an image before which you now experience shame or even less, as this dream is reduced to a faded memory. Nevertheless, within the human species profound models exist, sleeping, biding their time. These models are the translation of impulses that your body sends to the space of representation.
4. We are not discussing the origin or consistency of these models, or the complexity of the world in which they are found. We are simply noting that they exist and pointing out that their function is to compensate needs and aspirations which, in turn, motivate human activities toward the external landscape.
5. Entire peoples and cultures also have their own particular ways of responding to the external landscape, responses always colored by internal models, which history and their own bodies continue to define.
6. Wise are those who know their profound models, and wiser still are those who can place them at the service of the best of causes.

XVII. The Internal Guide

1. Who do you so admire that you would like to have been that person?
2. Let me ask you in a more gentle fashion: Whom do you consider so exemplary that you wish you could find some of that person's virtues in yourself?
3. Perhaps there have been moments when in sorrow or confusion you have appealed to the memory of someone who, whether existing or not, came to your aid as a comforting image?
4. I am speaking of those particular models that we could call internal "guides," which at times coincide with real people.
5. Those models, which you have wanted to follow from the time you were very young, have changed only in the most external layers of your daily awareness.
6. I have seen how children talk and play with their imaginary companions and guides. I have seen people of all ages connect with these guides in prayers offered in sincere devotion.
7. The more strongly these guides were called, the further away they responded from and the better the signal they sent. Because of this I knew that the most profound guides are the most powerful. But only a great need can awaken them from their millennia of lethargy.
8. Such a model "possesses" three important attributes: strength, wisdom, and kindness.
9. If you want to know yourself better, observe the characteristics of the men and women you admire. Notice how the qualities you most value in them are also at work in the configuration of your own internal guides. Consider that even though your initial references may have disappeared with the passage of time, they have left "traces" within you that continue to motivate you toward the external landscape.
10. And if you want to understand how diverse cultures interact with each other, in addition to studying their modes of producing objects, study as well the methods by which they transmit their models.
11. It is important, then, to direct your attention to the best qualities in others, because you will project into the world those qualities you have managed to configure in yourself.

XVIII. The Change

Let us look back for a moment.

We have considered the human being as integrally connected to the world, influencing it and influenced by it. We have said that human actions are made manifest in the external landscape according to how their internal landscapes are formed. These actions will vary, but what ultimately defines a life are its contradictory and unifying actions. While contradiction inverts life, contaminating the world with the suffering it produces, unitive actions open the future, causing suffering to recede in oneself and in the world.

"To humanize the earth" is the same as "to give" in unifying actions. Any purpose that ends in receiving can only have a provisional meaning; it is destined to lead toward contradiction.

Faith is an enormous energy that can be mobilized in the service of life. And there are other forces that also operate in the internal landscape, motivating human activity toward the external landscape. These are the models.

1. Definitively the question is this: Do you want to surpass the abyss?
2. Perhaps you do, but how will you take a new direction if the avalanche has already been unleashed, dragging with it everything in its path?
3. Whatever your decision, you must know what resources and what energy you can count on to produce this change.
4. While your decision is very much your own, I would like to point out that you will not be able to change the direction of your life by relying only on the resources of internal work. Rather, you will need to act decisively in the world, modifying behaviors.
5. And how will you carry out this task and also add to it your immediate environment, which decisively influences you, and which you, in turn, influence? Only by awakening the faith that it is possible to convert this inverted life.
6. I will leave you at this point, but if you are prepared to change your life, you will transform the world—and then it will not be the abyss that triumphs but that which overcomes it.

The Human Landscape

I. Looks and Landscapes

1. Let us speak of landscapes and looks, turning once again to what was said in the beginning: “External landscape is what we perceive of things, while internal landscape is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world. These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality.”
2. Beginning with the perception of an external object, a naive look may confuse “what is seen” with reality itself. Some go further, believing that they remember “reality” just as it was. And still others confuse objects they have perceived and then transformed in other states of consciousness (their illusions, hallucinations, or dream images) with material objects.
3. It is not difficult for reasonable people to understand that objects perceived in an earlier moment can appear distorted in dreams and memories. But the simplicity of daily action, of doing with and among things, is shaken to its core by the idea that perceived objects are *always* covered by a multicolored mantle woven of other, simultaneous perceptions and memories; that perception is an overall mode of *being-in-the-midst-of-things,* and includes an emotional tone and the general state of one’s body.
4. The naive look grasps the “external” world along with its own pain or its own joy. I do not look with my eyes alone, but also with my heart, with gentle recollection, with ominous suspicion, with cold calculation, with stealthy comparison. I look through allegories, signs, and symbols, and though I do not see these things in my looking, they act on it nonetheless, just as when I look I do not see my eye or its activity.
5. Because of the complexity of perceiving, I prefer to use the word *landscape* rather than *object* when speaking of reality, whether external or internal. And with that, I take it as given that I am referring to complexes and structures, and not to objects in some isolated and abstract individuality.

   I want to emphasize, too, that these landscapes correspond to acts of perception that I call *looks* (encroaching, perhaps illegitimately, on fields unrelated to visualization). These looks are active and complex acts that organize landscapes. They are not simple passive acts of receiving external information (data that arrive through my external senses) or internal information (that is, sensations from my own body, memories, apperceptions).

   There should be no need to add that in these mutual interrelations between looks and landscapes, the distinction between internal and external is drawn on the basis of the direction of the intentionality of the consciousness—and not as is frequently set forth in the naive schemata that are presented to schoolchildren.
6. If you have understood the foregoing, you will also understand that when I speak of the human landscape I am referring to a type of external landscape that is

composed of people and—even on those occasions when the human being *per se* is absent—human acts and intentions made manifest in objects.

7. It is important, then, to distinguish between the *internal world* and *internal landscape,* between *nature* and *external landscape,* between *society* and *human landscape.* What I am trying to emphasize is that to speak of landscapes always implies *one who looks,* as opposed to situations in which the internal (psychological) world, nature, or society are naively taken as existing in themselves, independent of any interpretation.

II. The External Look and That Which Is Human

1. Nothing substantial is being said when we are told that “Human beings are constituted by their environment.” Nor when it is said that “thanks to the environment (environment being understood by some as natural, by others as social, and by still others as both natural and social) the human being is constituted.” This idea appears all the more inconsistent when we focus on the relationship implied by the word “constituted”—assuming, of course, that we already understand the terms “human being” and “environment.” Presumably, “environment” is that which surrounds the human being, or better, that in which the human being is immersed, and the “human being” is that which is within or immersed in that “environment.”

   We find ourselves, then, as at the beginning, in a circle of vacuities. Though the two terms being related point to separate entities, we can observe an intention to unite them in a deceptive relationship through the use of the word “constitute”—a word that has implications of genesis, that is to say, of explaining something by means of its origins.
2. This assertion would be of no particular interest were it not for the fact that it is presented as a paradigm of similar assertions that for millennia have offered an image of the human being as seen from the *outside*. That is, looking at the human being from the standpoint of things and not from the standpoint of the look that looks at things. To say “the human being is a social animal” or “man is made in the image of God” is to make society or God into the entity that looks at the human being, while in reality it is only from the *human look* that society and God are conceived, and accepted or denied.
3. And so, in a world where an inhuman look has long been established, there have also been established behaviors and institutions that annihilate our humanity. So it was that one of the questions that arose in the observation of nature concerned the “nature” of the human being, and the responses that were given were like those that might be given about any natural object.
4. Even those currents of thought that have presented the human being as subject to continuing transformation have considered *what is human* from within one of the several perspectives of historical naturalism—that is, from an external look.
5. The underlying idea of “human nature” corresponds to an external look directed at that which is human. But human beings are historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature. Knowing this subordinates the concept of “human nature” to existence and its tasks—making it subject to the transformations and revelations directed by this existence. Thus, the body, as the prosthesis of intention, extends its potentialities through humanizing the world—a

world that can no longer be seen as simple externality but instead as a *landscape,* natural or human, that is subject to present or possible transformations. And it is through this activity that the human being also transforms itself.

III. The Human Body as the Object of Intention

1. The body, as a natural object, is subject to natural modifications, and thanks to human intention is, of course, susceptible to transformation—not only in its most external expressions but also in its innermost functioning. One's own body takes on its greatest significance when viewed in this way—as the *prosthesis of intention.* However, a social process intervenes between the immediate (unmediated) governance of one's own body and the adaptation of the body to the needs and purposes of others. This process does not depend on the isolated individual but entails others as well.
2. Ownership of my psychophysical structure is given by my intentionality, while external objects present themselves to me as only indirectly subject to my control (through the action of my body) and outside of my immediate ownership. There is a particular type of object, however, that I intuit as the property of a foreign intention, and that is the body of the other. That *otherness* puts me in the position of being "seen from outside," seen from someone else's intention. My vision of the other is, therefore, an interpretation—a landscape extending to every object that carries the mark of human intention, whether produced or used today or in the past.

   In that human landscape I can obliterate the intention of others by considering them prostheses of my own body, in which case I must "empty" them of their subjectivity, at least in those areas of thought, feeling, or action that I wish to control directly. But this objectification of others necessarily dehumanizes me as well, and so I justify this situation by claiming that it is the consequence of "Passion," "God," "A Cause," "Natural Inequity," "Fate," "Society," and so forth.

IV. Memory and the Human Landscape

1. When faced with an unfamiliar landscape, I appeal to my memory and notice as "new" that which I "recognize" as absent in myself. The same thing occurs in a human landscape, where today's language, clothing, and customs contrast sharply with that landscape in which my memories were formed. In a society where change is slow, however, my previous landscape tends to overwhelm these novel aspects, and I dismiss them as "irrelevant."
2. If I live in a society in which change occurs very swiftly, I tend not to recognize the value of change or to consider it "superficial," without realizing that the inner loss I experience is the loss of that social landscape in which my memory was formed.
3. Thanks to all of this I understand that when a generation comes to power, it tends to give external expression to the myths and theories, the desires, appetites, and values of its formative landscapes—landscapes that no longer exist yet still live and act in the social memory of the landscape in which this group was formed. It also happens that the landscape that children assimilate as the human landscape is seen by their parents as "irrelevant" or a "diversion."

   However fiercely the generations may struggle between themselves, when a new generation comes to power it immediately becomes obstructionist, attempting to impose its own landscape of formation on a human landscape that has already changed—and which that generation itself may even have helped to change. Thus, in those transformations instituted by the group that is in power there are, dragged along from its formative years, the obstructions against which the newer group that is forming will clash.

When I have spoken of the "power" that a generation acquires, I trust that I have been correctly understood as referring to power in all its forms: political, social, cultural, and so forth.

V. The Distance Imposed by the Human Landscape

1. Every generation has its own particular cunning and will not hesitate to institute the most sophisticated of “reforms” if it can thereby increase its power. But this leads to countless difficulties as the transformations each generation sets in motion drag society toward a future that, in the present dynamic, is already in contradiction with the inner social landscape that it strives to maintain. This is why I say that every generation has not only its own particular cunning but also its own particular trap.
2. Which human landscape do these unwarranted longings confront? To begin with, it is a *perceived* human landscape that is different from the landscape that is *remembered.* It is also a human landscape that does not correspond to the emotional tone, the general emotional climate of our memories of people, buildings, streets, occupations, and institutions. And it is this “strangeness” or “estrangement” that most clearly shows that, even when we are dealing with everyday or familiar matters, every perceived landscape is a distinct and all-encompassing reality different from the one remembered. So it is that one’s appetites, which have for so long yearned to possess certain objects (things, persons, situations), are disappointed in their fulfillment. And this is the distance that the dynamic of the human landscape imposes upon every memory, whether individual or collective, whether held by one, by many, or by an entire generation whose members coexist in a single social space, surrounded by a similar emotional background. How much greater becomes the distance, then, when *different* generations—representatives of distinct times coexisting within a single space—try to reach agreement about something! And if it seems that we are speaking of enemies, I must stress that these gulfs open even between those who would appear to share similar interests.
3. Never do I touch the same object twice in the same way, nor feel the same intention twice. And that which I believe I perceive as intention in others is only a distance, which I interpret differently each time. Thus, the human landscape, whose distinguishing characteristic is *intention,* throws into sharp relief the estrangement that many have thought a result of the objective conditions of a society devoid of solidarity, a society that casts the dispossessed consciousness into exile. Having erred in their appraisal of the essence of human intention, they found that as the human landscape accelerated, the society they had built with such effort was divided by generational chasms and had become estranged from itself. Other societies, developing along different paths, suffered precisely the same shock—all of which by now has demonstrated that the fundamental problems of the human being can be resolved only by focusing on the intention

that transcends objects, the intention for which the social object is simply the dwelling. In the same way, all of nature, including the human body, should be understood as the dwelling of the transformative intention.

4. The perception of the human landscape brings me face to face with myself—it is an emotional engagement, a thing that negates me or propels me forward. Even as I continue to accumulate memories, I am drawn forward from my “today” by future intention. This future, which conditions the present; this image; this feeling, confused or desired; this action, freely chosen or imposed, also marks my past, because it changes what I consider to have been my past.

VI. Education

1. In the first place, the perception of and action of the external landscape involves the body and an emotional way of *being-in-the-world.* Of course, as I have previously mentioned, it also commits one to a particular vision of reality. That is why I believe that to educate is fundamentally to prepare the new generations to exercise a non-naive vision of reality, so that their look takes the world into account not as some supposed objective *reality-in-itself* but rather as the object of transformative human actions.

   I am speaking here not of information about the world but rather of the intellectual exercise of a particular unbiased vision of landscapes and of an attentive practice turned to one's own *look.* A basic education should bear in mind the practice of coherent thinking. In this case, we are not speaking of knowledge in the strict sense but rather of contact with one's own registers of thinking.
2. In the second place, education should provide the stimulus for emotional comprehension and development. Therefore, in planning an integrated education one should consider exercises in both theatrical performance and other kinds of self-expression, along with the development of skills in harmony and rhythm. The objective of all this is not, however, procedures that claim to "produce" artistic talents, but rather to enable individuals to make emotional contact with themselves and others, thereby avoiding the disorders that are produced by an education based on isolation and inhibition.
3. In the third place, we should include a practice that will put into harmonious play all of a person's corporal resources. Sports can lead to a one-sided rather than integrated development, and the discipline we propose more closely resembles gymnastics practiced as an art rather than a sport, because it involves getting in touch with one's body and managing it with ease. For all these reasons sports would not be considered a developmental activity, though the cultivation of sports could be important if based on the discipline referred to above.
4. I have spoken so far about education from the point of view of the human being's formative activities in the human landscape, but I have not spoken about the relationship between information and knowledge, or about the incorporation of data through study, or about practice as a way of acquiring knowledge.

VII. History

1. As long as one continues to think about the historical process from an external look, it is pointless to try to explain it as the progressive unfolding of human intentionality in its struggle to overcome pain (physical) and suffering (mental). And so it is that while there are those concerned with unveiling the innermost laws of human events on the basis of matter, or spirit, or a certain line of reasoning, in truth they always see the internal mechanism they seek from "outside" the human being.
2. Of course, the historical process will continue to be understood as the development of a form that is, when all is said and done, nothing but the mental form of those who view things in that particular way. And it does not matter what sort of dogma is appealed to, the background that dictates one's adherence to that position will always be *that-which-one-wants-to-see.*

VIII. Ideologies

1. The ideologies that prevailed during certain historical moments showed their usefulness in orienting human action and interpreting the world in which the lives of both individuals and human groups unfolded. Those ideologies have now been displaced by others, whose greatest achievement lies in appearing to be reality itself—supremely concrete and immediate, exempt from all “ideology.”
2. Thus, the opportunists of the past, whose hallmark was their betrayal of every commitment, appear in these times of the crisis of ideologies, calling themselves “pragmatists” or “realists” without the vaguest idea of the origins of these terms. In any case, they brazenly espouse their false schematicism, presenting it as the pinnacle of intelligence and virtue.
3. As social change accelerated, the gulf between successive generations rapidly widened, while the human landscape in which they were formed grew ever more distant from the human landscape in which they were required to act, leaving them orphaned, bereft of any theory or model of conduct. Thus they were obliged to give ever more rapid and increasingly improvised responses, becoming “situationalist,” limited to only a short-term approach to action. And with that, any idea of process and all notion of historicity began to wane, and in their place appeared a look that was increasingly analytical and fragmented.
4. It turns out that these pragmatic cynics are the shameful grandchildren of those hard-working builders of “unhappy consciousness” and the children of those who denounced ideologies as the “masking” of reality. And so it is that all pragmatism bears the familial stamp of absolutism. Thus we hear them say, “We must rely on reality and not on theories.” This, however, has only brought them innumerable difficulties, as when irrationalist currents emerged declaring, “We must rely on *our* reality and not on your theories.”

IX. Violence

1. When people speak of the *methodology of action* in the context of social and political struggle, the subject of violence frequently arises. There are, however, prior issues that bear on this topic.
2. Violence will continue to color all social activity as long as the human being does not fully realize a human society—a society in which power is in the hands of the social whole and not some part of it that subordinates and objectifies the whole. Therefore, when we speak of violence we must talk of the established world. And if one opposes that world in nonviolent struggle, one must begin by stressing that what characterizes a nonviolent attitude is that *it does not tolerate violence.* Then it is not a question of justifying any particular type of struggle but of defining the conditions of violence imposed by this inhuman system.
3. At the same time, many errors result from confusing nonviolence with pacifism. While nonviolence needs no justification as a methodology of action, pacifism, which considers peace to be a state of nonbelligerence, must carefully consider what conditions bring us closer to or take us further from that peace. And so while pacifism approaches issues such as disarmament as the essential social priorities, in fact armamentism is but one particular case of the threat of physical violence under the direction of the power established by that minority of people which manipulates the State.

   The issue of disarmament is of utmost importance, and it is all to the good that pacifism raises this urgent question. However, even were it successful in its demands it would not thereby be able to modify the context of this violence or, except in the most artificial fashion, to extend its proposals to include modifying the social structure itself. There are, of course, a number of models of pacifism and various theoretical foundations within this current, but none of them can provide a more comprehensive model. If, however, this vision of the world were broader, we would certainly be in the presence of a doctrine that would include pacifism. And in this case we would need to discuss the foundations of that broader doctrine before supporting or rejecting the type of pacifism that derives from it.

X. Law

1. “Your rights end where the rights of others begin.” Therefore: “The rights of others end where your rights begin.” However, since it is generally the first and not the second phrase that is emphasized, we are led to suspect that those who maintain this position see themselves as “the others”—that is, as the representatives of all other people, as the representatives of an established system that needs no justification.
2. There has been no lack of those who would derive the law from some purported “human nature,” but as this has already been discussed it would add nothing to the subject at hand.
3. Practical people who have not lost themselves in theorizing have concluded simply that the law is necessary if people are to coexist within a society. It has also been said that the laws are made in order to defend the interests of those who impose them.
4. It would appear that it is a preexisting situation of power that establishes any given law, and that law in turn legitimates power. So it is power, as the imposition of an intention, whether accepted or not, that is our central theme. It is said that “might does not make right,” but this nonsense can be accepted only if one thinks of “might” simply as brute physical force. In reality, however, force (economic, political, and so on) does not need to be expressed perceptually in order to make its presence felt and to command respect. Moreover, the naked threat of physical force (the force of arms, for example) is used to impose situations that the law is used to justify. Nor should we overlook the fact that the use of arms in a given direction depends on human intention and not on laws.
5. Those who violate the law ignore a situation imposed in the present and expose their temporality (their future) to the decisions of others. But it is clear that this “present” in which the law is in force has its roots in the past. Custom, morality, religion, and social consensus are the sources generally invoked to justify the existence of law. Each of these in turn depends on the power that imposed it. And these purported sources are reconsidered whenever the power that gave them origin has declined or transformed to such a degree that maintaining the prior juridical order begins to conflict with “what is reasonable,” with “common sense,” and so forth.

   Apparently the law is not broken, at least not when the legislature modifies a law or the people’s representatives change the country’s constitution. And this is so because those who take these actions are not exposed to the decisions of others—that is, they either hold power themselves or act as the representatives of some power. These situations make it clear that power generates laws and obligations, and not the reverse.

6. Human rights are not in universal effect as we would wish, and that is because there is not a universal power of humanity, but instead these rights depend on the power that one part of humankind holds over the whole. Since we find in every latitude that even the most elementary demands for control over one's own body are trampled upon, we can speak only of aspirations that have yet to be transformed into rights. Human rights do not belong to the past, they are there in the future, calling to our intentionality and fueling a struggle that is reborn with every new infringement upon human destiny. Thus, every demand made, every voice raised on behalf of human rights is meaningful because it shows the powers-that-be that they are not omnipotent, nor do they control the future.

XI. The State

1. It has been said that a nation is a legal entity formed of the totality of the inhabitants of a country under the rule of a given government. Subsequently, this idea was extended to include a country's territory. In truth, however, a nation can exist for millennia without being ruled by a given government, without being limited to a single territory, and without being legally recognized by any state.

   What defines a nation is the mutual recognition established between people who identify with similar values and aspire to a common future. And this has nothing to do with race or language—or with history understood as "a lengthy period of time with its roots in a mythic past." A nation can be formed today, can grow toward the future, or founder tomorrow, just as it can incorporate into its project other people or groups. In this sense, one could speak of the formation of a *human nation* which has yet to take shape as such and has suffered countless persecutions and failures—above all the failure of the future landscape.
2. To the State, an entity that in fact has to do with certain forms of government regulated by law, is often attributed the mysterious ability to form nationalities and to be, itself, the nation. But this recent fiction of the nation-state is suffering the onslaught of a rapidly transforming human landscape. Thus, the powers that formed the present-day State and endowed it with simple attributes of intermediation now find themselves in a position to move beyond the present form of that apparatus, an apparatus that apparently concentrates in itself the power of the nation.
3. The "powers" of the State are not the real powers, the powers that generate rights and obligations and that administer or enforce certain rules. Rather, as the monopoly of this apparatus grew, it became transformed into the successive (or permanent) spoils of the warring factions. In the end it came to benefit only an increasingly irrelevant bureaucracy, hobbling the freedom of action of the true powers and hindering the activity of the people. Thus, none but the most obstructionist elements of society benefit from the form of the present-day State.

   The point is that, along with the progressive decentralization and decrease of State power, there must be a corresponding growth in the power of the social whole. The only guarantee that today's grotesque State will not simply be replaced by the unrestrained power of those same interests that created it (and which today strive to dispense with it), is to be found in those factors that the people themselves manage and supervise with solidarity, free from the paternalism of any faction.
4. A people that is in a position to increase its real power (unmediated by the State or by the power held by some part of the whole) will best be able to project itself toward the future as the vanguard of the *universal human nation.*

5. Do not believe that when empires annexed territories and nations they granted greater decision-making power to the conquered peoples; rather they imposed the homogeneous dominion of their own narrow interests. In the same way, people's decision-making powers will not increase through artificial union in supranational entities.
6. While many now anticipate a regional unification of wealth (or poverty) in dialectic with extra-regional powers, any temporary benefits that may result from this arrangement will not imply that the fundamental problem of realizing a fully human society has been resolved. Any society, of whatever form, that is not fully human will be subject to unexpected pitfalls and catastrophes resulting from surrendering its decisions to the will of special interests.
7. As a consequence of regional unification there may emerge either a monstrous super-State or the unrestrained domination of the (now totally homogenized) special interests of earlier times. Imposing, in either case, their power in the most sophisticated fashion on the whole of society, they will give rise to innumerable conflicts, which will shake the very basis of such unions and unleash devastating centrifugal forces. If, on the other hand, the *people*'s decision-making power increases, then the integration of diverse communities will herald the emergence of the developing human nation.

XII. Religion

1. That which is said about things and events is not the things and the events themselves, but rather “figures” that have a certain structure in common with them. Thanks to that common structure, it is possible to talk about things and events. That structure, however, cannot in turn be talked about in the same way that things are talked about because it is the structure of that which is being said as well as of things and events. Thus, language can point to, but not speak of, that which “includes” everything (even language itself). Such is the case of “God.”
2. Much has been said about God, but all of that appears, then, to be a contradiction in terms, to the extent that we notice what is being said, what one claims to be saying.
3. We can say nothing about God. We can speak only of what has been said about God. Many things have been said about God, and much can be said about all this that has been said, but not because of this are we making any progress on the theme of God insofar as it refers to God *per se.*
4. This kind of tongue twister aside, religions can be of profound interest only when they attempt to *point to* God rather than to *talk about* God.
5. Religions, however, express that which exists in their respective landscapes, and consequently a religion is neither true nor false, because its value is not logical. Its value lies in the type of internal register that it evokes, in the agreement between the landscapes one wishes to express and what is really being demonstrated.
6. Religious literature is often linked to landscapes, both external and human, and the characteristics and attributes of their gods are not independent of those landscapes. Nevertheless, even when these external and human landscapes change, this religious literature may endure into new times. And that is hardly surprising, given that nonreligious literature of various kinds also finds a following and awakens emotions in distant eras. Nor does a cult’s persistence through time say much about its “truth,” since legal formalities and social ceremonies often pass from culture to culture and continue to be observed even when knowledge of their original significance has been lost.
7. A religion bursts onto a human landscape in a particular historical period, and so it is often said that at that moment God “reveals” himself to the human being. But in order for that revelation to be accepted in a given historical moment, something must take place in the internal landscape of the human being. That change has generally been interpreted as if “outside” the human being, placing it in the external or social world, and there are certain benefits to be gained in doing so. But something is lost as well—the ability to understand the religious phenomenon as an internal register.

8. But religions have also portrayed themselves as something external, and in so doing they have prepared the ground for the above-mentioned interpretations.
9. When I speak of “external religion,” I am not referring to the projection of psychological images as icons, paintings, statues, buildings, or relics (things proper to visual perception). Nor am I referring to projections in the form of chanting and prayer (proper to auditory perception), nor to their projection as gestures, postures, or the turning of the body in certain directions (proper to kinesthetic and coenesthetic perceptions). Finally, I do not say that a religion is external because it has its sacred books, sacraments, and so on. I do not even call it external because to its liturgy it adds a church, an organization, or holy days, or because it requires of its followers a certain physical state or age in order to carry out specific operations. No, that is the way the followers of the various religions struggle among themselves, each accusing the other faction of various degrees of idolatry because of a preference for working with certain types of images. Rather than dealing with anything substantial, however, this only demonstrates the complete psychological ignorance of the contending parties.
10. When I speak of “external religion” I am referring to any religion that claims to talk about God and the will of God instead of speaking about the religious sentiment and the innermost register of the human being. Even seeking support in externalized worship could be meaningful if through such practices the believers were able to awaken in themselves (were able to reveal) the presence of God.
11. The fact that until now religions have been external corresponds to the type of human landscape in which they were born and developed. Nevertheless, the birth of an inner religion is possible, or in order to survive contemporary religions may convert to an internal religiosity. However, this will only occur to the extent that the internal landscape is ready to accept a new revelation. We are now beginning to catch glimpses of this in those societies in which the human landscape is undergoing such drastic change that the need for internal references is becoming a matter of extreme urgency.
12. None of what has been said about religions can remain standing today, however, for both religion’s apologists and its critics have failed to notice the change that is taking place within the human being. If in the past some people have thought of religions as soporifics to political or social action, today they oppose them for their powerful influence in those fields. Where others once imagined religions imposing their message, now they find that this message has changed. And those who once believed that religions would last forever, today doubt their eternity, while those who assumed that religions were soon to disappear are now surprised to witness the irruption of new forms that are manifestly or latently mystical.
13. There are few in this field who can intuit what the future holds, because there are so few concerned with trying to understand in what direction human intentionality, which definitively transcends the individual human being, is heading. If humanity desires something new to “make itself known,” it is because that which tends to

make itself known is already operating in humankind’s internal landscape. But it is not by claiming to be the representative of some god that the internal register of the human being is converted into the dwelling-place or the landscape of a transcendent look, a transcendent intention.

XIII. Open Roads

1. And what of work, money, love, death, and the many other aspects of the human landscape barely touched on in these commentaries? Certainly there is much more to say for anyone who wishes to, as long as it is done bearing in mind this way of approaching the issues: referring looks to landscapes and understanding that landscapes change looks.
2. Since this is the case, there is no need to speak of other subjects. If someone is interested in these ideas and the way we have spoken about them up to now, they can speak in the same way that we would. On the other hand, it would make no sense to continue to speak for others if we are talking about things that are of no interest to anyone or with a form of expression that does not allow things to be brought to light.

Notes to Humanize the Earth

The Inner Look

The Inner Look is divided into twenty chapters, which are subdivided into numbered passages. The principal themes can be grouped as follows:

- The first two chapters are introductory, presenting the author's intentions, the reader's attitude, and how this relationship can best be carried forward.
- Chapters III through XII develop the more general topics, presenting them in ten "days" of reflection.
- Chapter XIII marks a turning point, moving from more general topics to consider questions of conduct and attitudes in facing life.
- The remaining chapters contain explanations about internal work.

The topics appear in the following order:

I. *Meditation*—The objective of the book: to convert non-meaning into meaning.
II. *Disposition to Comprehend*—The mental posture needed in order to understand these themes.
III. *Non-Meaning*—Death and the meaning of life.
IV. *Dependence*—The influence of the environment on the human being.
V. *Intimation of Meaning*—Some non-habitual mental phenomena.
VI. *Sleep and Awakening*—Distinguishes between various levels of consciousness—sleep, semi-sleep, vigil with reverie, and full vigil—and their relationship to the perception of reality. External and internal senses as well as memory.
VII. *Presence of the Force*—The growth of comprehension in vigil. The energy or Force that is rooted in and moves through the body.
VIII. *Control of the Force*—Relates the depth or superficiality of the energy to the levels of consciousness.
IX. *Manifestations of the Energy*—Control and loss of control of the energy.
X. *Evidence of Meaning*—Continuity and internal unity or contradiction.
XI. *The Luminous Center*—Relates the energy to the inner allegory of the "luminous center." Phenomena of internal integration as "ascent toward the light." Phenomena of internal dissolution registered as "withdrawal from the light."
XII. *The Discoveries*—Circulation of the energy. Levels. The nature of the Force represented as "light." Examples from diverse peoples.
XIII. *The Principles*—The Principles as references for internal unity.
XIV. *Guide to the Inner Road*—Representations of the phenomena that accompany the directions of "descent" and "ascent."
XV. *The Experience of Peace and the Passage of the Force*—Procedures.
XVI. *Projection of the Force*—Projection and meaning.
XVII. *Loss and Repression of the Force*—Discharges of the energy. Sex as the center that produces energy.
XVIII. *Action and Reaction of the Force*—Associating representations with emotional charges. Evoking an image that has previously been linked to emotional states, which then elicits or returns the associated states. "Being thankful" as a technique useful in daily life to associate images with positive emotional states.
XIX. *The Internal States*—The various mental situations in which those interested in internal work may find themselves.
XX. *Internal Reality*—The link between mental processes and allegorical representations of the external world.

The Internal Landscape

The Internal Landscape is divided into eighteen chapters, which are subdivided into numbered passages. The principal themes can be grouped as follows:

- Chapters I and II are introductory and direct questions to the reader about his or her happiness, suffering, and interests in life.
- Chapters III through VI examine the different types of landscapes—external, human, and internal—and their interaction.
- Chapter VII touches on the themes of pain, suffering, and meaning in life. These points, and others related to valid action in the world, are further developed through Chapter XIII.
- In Chapters XIV through XVIII the central themes are the motives and direction of human actions, along with proposals for change in the meaning of life.

The topics appear in the following order:

I. *The Question*—Queries the reader about happiness and suffering. Proposes a direction toward overcoming suffering.

II. *Reality*—Discusses the nature of the "real," relating what one perceives to the conformation of the human being.

III. *The External Landscape*—Points out that every external landscape varies according to what is happening within the one who is perceiving it.

IV. *The Human Landscape*—Shows how the human landscape involves the interior of the person. Denies the right of factions or special interests to demand that others must adopt their answers to the problems that individuals and societies currently face. Affirms the need to define action toward the human world.

V. *The Internal Landscape*—Explains that at the base of all human activity lie beliefs. Emphasizes, however, that the internal landscape is not only a field of beliefs but of memories, perceptions, and images as well. Observes that the relation *internal-external landscape* is a structure in which both terms are correlates and can alternately be taken as acts or objects.

VI. *Center and Reflection*—Indicates the possibility of placing oneself in the center of the internal landscape, from which any direction chosen is a reflection of this center. Shows that the path to learning lies through action and not solely through contemplation.

VII. *Pain, Suffering, and Meaning in Life*—Distinguishes between physical pain and mental suffering. Introduces the phrase "Humanize the Earth" as the key to meaning in life, emphasizing the primacy of the future over the present or the past.

VIII. *The Rider and His Shadow*—Breaks the monotony of previous chapters with a shift in style. Nevertheless, again considers the problems of the different times in human life (past, present, and future), seeking in them the root of memory, perception, and imagination. These three pathways are later considered "the three pathways of suffering" to the extent that contradiction inverts the times of consciousness.

IX. *Contradiction and Unity*—Continues to explore the interplay of the various times in human life. Emphasizes the differences between everyday problems or difficulties on the one hand, and contradiction on the other, presenting the defining characteristics of contradiction. Proposes changes in the organization of the internal landscape.

X. *Valid Action*—Explains that not only contradiction but all inversion in the growing current of life generates suffering. Emphasizes the importance of *valid actions* as unifying acts that are capable of overcoming contradiction. Presents an implicit critique of the foundations of morality when not developed based on the need to give unity to the human being, to provide references for surpassing contradiction and suffering.

XI. *Projection of the Internal Landscape*—Emphasizes that both contradictory and unifying acts commit the future of those who produce them, as well as the future of all who are in contact with them. In this sense, individual contradiction "contaminates" others, while individual unity also affects others.

XII. *Compensation, Reflection, and the Future*—The background of this chapter is the age-old debate between determinism and freedom. Concisely reviews the mechanics of human actions as the interplay of compensatory actions as well as the reflection of the external landscape, without overlooking accidents as another phenomenon capable of undoing all human projects. Finally, emphasizes the search for the growth of life without limit as a leap over determining conditions.

XIII. *Provisional Meanings*—Outlines the dialectic between "provisional meanings" and "meaning in life." Places affirmation of life as the highest value, suggesting that it is the rebellion against death that drives all progress.

XIV. *Faith*—Notes the feeling of suspicion experienced upon hearing the word "faith." Distinguishes between naive faith, fanatical faith, and faith applied in the service of life. Gives faith maximum importance as the energy that mobilizes all enthusiasm in life.

XV. *To Give and To Receive*—Establishes that the act of giving opens the future, and that all valid actions go in this direction. Receiving, in contrast, is centripetal, and dies in the individual. It is through giving that one can change the direction of a contradictory life.

XVI. *Models*—Explains "models" as the internal images that motivate human activities toward the external world, while noting that such images are modified with changes in the internal landscape.

XVII. *The Internal Guide*—Refers to the existence of models in the internal landscape that are examples of how to act. Such models can be called "internal guides."

XVIII. *The Change*—Studies the possibility of voluntary change in human conduct.

The Human Landscape

The Human Landscape is divided into thirteen chapters, which are subdivided into numbered passages. The principal themes can be grouped as follows:

- The first five chapters are dedicated to clarifying the meaning of the human landscape and the *look* that is related to that landscape.
- The following seven chapters address central questions that arise in the human landscape.
- Chapter thirteen concludes the themes developed, inviting the reader to continue the study of important issues that have been treated only in passing in this work.

The topics appear in the following order:

I. *Looks and Landscapes*—Establishes the difference between internal, external, and human landscapes. Introduces distinctions between *looks* of different types.

II. *The External Look and That Which Is Human*—Reviews what has been said about the human being from an "external look."

III. *The Human Body as the Object of Intention*—Intentionality and the governing of one's own body without intermediation. The objectification of others' bodies and the "emptying" of their subjectivity.

IV. *Memory and the Human Landscape*—The lack of correspondence between the human landscape perceived in the present and the human landscape deriving from the period of formation of the one perceiving.

V. *The Distance Imposed by the Human Landscape*—The distance between the perceived human landscape and the represented human landscape arises not only from the

difference in times but also from *ways of being-in-the-world* that depend on the emotions and the presence of one's own body.

VI. *Education*—Recommends that an integral education embody coherent thinking as contact with one's own registers of thinking; that it should consider awareness and emotional development as contact with oneself and others; and that it should not overlook practices that bring into play the full range of each person's corporal resources. Distinguishes between education as formation, information as the integration of data through study, and practice as a form of study.

VII. *History*—Until now history has been looked at from the "outside," without taking human intentionality into account.

VIII. *Ideologies*—In times when ideologies are in crisis there arise "ideologemas" that claim to represent reality itself. Such is the case with so-called "pragmatism."

IX. *Violence*—Nonviolence as a methodology of social and political struggle does not require justification. It is a system in which violence predominates that needs justification in order to impose itself. Distinguishes between pacifism and nonviolence.

X. *Law*—Considers both the origin of law and the theme of power as a precondition for any law.

XI. *The State*—The State as an apparatus of intermediation between the real power held by a part of society and the social whole.

XII. *Religion*—Religions as "externality" inasmuch as they attempt to speak about God and not about the inner register of God in the human being.

XIII. *Open Roads*—Concludes by inviting the reader to study and further develop important themes of the human landscape that have not been addressed in this work.

Guided Experiences

Part One: Tales

I. The Child

It is early in the morning as I walk through the countryside, and I feel happy and at peace. Up ahead, I see a stone building that seems to be very old. Its ancient roof is also made of stone, and along the front stand large marble columns.

As I near the building, I can see it has a massive metal door. Suddenly, I'm surprised when two ferocious beasts charge toward me from one side of the building. Fortunately they're held back by strong chains, which stop them just out of reach.

I can't approach the door without being attacked by the animals, so I throw them a sack of food. The beasts eagerly devour the food, and soon fall fast asleep.

Approaching the door, I inspect it carefully, but cannot find a door handle or any way to open it. Nevertheless I push gently, and the door swings open with an ancient creaking sound.

A long, softly lit room opens before me. I cannot see to the end, but on the left and right are life-size paintings that reach nearly to the floor. Each portrays a different scene. The first, on my left, depicts a magician seated behind a table spread with cards, dice, and other games of chance. My gaze is drawn to this character's curious hat.

I try to run my finger over the hat in the painting, but feel no resistance to my touch—instead my arm enters right into the picture. So I go ahead and put one leg, and then my whole body into the painting.

Raising a hand, the magician exclaims, "Not so fast, you can't come in unless you pay admission!"

Searching through my pockets, I pull out a small crystalline sphere, which I give to this trickster. The colorful character nods, and I enter.

It is night, and I find myself in an amusement park. Everywhere I see mechanical rides, filled with light and movement—but I do not see any people.

Then I discover a child about ten years old, who is facing away from me. As I move closer, the youngster turns to look at me, and I realize it is myself when I was that age. (*)

"What are you doing here?" I ask. The child tells me something about an injustice that has happened, and then begins to cry. To console the child, I promise that we'll go on some rides, but the youngster insists on talking about the injustice. In order to understand the child better, I try to recall what happened to me at that age that was so unfair. (*)

Now I remember that injustice. And somehow I realize it's like a situation I'm experiencing in my life right now. I reflect on this, but the child continues to cry. (*)

So I say, "All right then, I'm going to straighten out this injustice that seems to keep happening to me. To begin with, I'll be friendly toward the people who are creating this situation for me." (*)

I notice that the youngster is laughing now. With an affectionate pat I say that we'll be seeing each other again. Saying good-bye, the child goes away very happy.

I leave the amusement park, passing beside the magician, who gives me a quick, sidelong glance. As I go by, I brush against his hat, prompting a playful wink from this extraordinary character.

I emerge from the painting, and once again find myself in the long room. Walking slowly, I cross the room and go through the door.

Outside, the animals remain fast asleep, and I pass between them without fear.

The magnificent day greets me. I make my way back across the open fields, whistling and singing, with the sensation that at last I understand a situation that has been a burden to me for a very long time. (*)

II. An Enemy

I am downtown at the height of rush hour, walking hurriedly amid the bustling people and traffic. All at once everything stops as if paralyzed, and I realize that I alone can still move. I begin looking at people, staring at a woman and then at a man. Walking around them several times, I examine them very closely.

Climbing up onto the roof of a car, I look all around and notice that everything has fallen silent. Reflecting for a moment, I realize that I can do anything I please with the people, the cars, and everything else. Immediately I set about doing all the things that strike my fancy, and carry on at such a frantic rate that soon I'm left exhausted.

While resting, I think of new things to do, and again throw myself into carrying out my every whim, without any inhibition.

But who do I see there? It's none other than the very person with whom I have a number of scores to settle. In fact, I feel this person has done me greater harm than anyone else in my entire life.

Since things won't remain motionless for long, I hurry over to my enemy, who can barely move. Realizing the situation, my adversary looks at me in horror, but is still paralyzed and defenseless. I begin to tell this despicable character everything I've been wanting to say, promising my immediate revenge.

Knowing that my adversary feels everything but cannot respond, I begin to bring up all the situations in which this person treated me so terribly. (*)

As I reproach my enemy, several people walk past. Hearing my accusations, they stop and begin to harshly criticize this character, who responds between sobs, expressing deep remorse for these past misdeeds. Kneeling on the ground, my adversary begs forgiveness, but more people arrive and continue the interrogation. (*)

After a while, the crowd declares that so vile a person cannot be allowed to live, and they condemn my enemy to death.

Just as they're about to lynch the terrified person, who keeps pleading for mercy, I tell them that I forgive my enemy. The crowd unanimously accepts my decision, and the people go on their way. Once again I'm left alone with my adversary, and I take advantage of this to finish getting even. Sensing my enemy's growing desperation, I say and do everything else that I feel is called for. (*)

The sky darkens threateningly, and a driving rain begins to fall. I take refuge behind a storefront window and watch as the city returns to life. Pedestrians run, and cars crawl cautiously through sheets of wind-whipped rain. Continuous flashes of lightning and sharp thunderclaps frame the scene, as I gaze out through the rain-streaked glass.

I feel completely relaxed, as though empty, while I observe almost without thinking.

Suddenly I see my adversary approaching, seeking shelter from the rain. On seeing me, the person exclaims, "How lucky that we're together in this storm!"

As my rain-soaked enemy looks at me sheepishly, I offer a comforting pat on the shoulder, while all the poor soul can do is shrug. (*)

In my mind I begin to consider all the problems that beset this character. I see the difficulties, the failures in life, this person's enormous frustrations and weakness. (*)

I feel the loneliness of the wet and trembling human being who is taking refuge at my side, and see how dirty and pathetically unkempt this person is. (*)

Suddenly, I'm moved by a strong feeling of solidarity with my companion and declare, "I'm going to help you." The person does not say a word, and growing misty-eyed, can only gaze down at both hands. (*)

The rain has stopped. Going out onto the street, I take a deep breath of the fresh air and leave at once.

III. My Greatest Mistake

I am standing before some sort of court. Every seat in the silent courtroom is filled, and I'm surrounded by a sea of stern faces. The court clerk adjusts his glasses and picks up a long document. Breaking the tremendous tension that fills the room, he solemnly pronounces, "It is the sentence of this court that the accused shall be put to death."

Immediately there is an uproar—some people applaud while others boo, and I see a woman faint. Finally an official manages to restore order in the courtroom.

Staring at me darkly, the clerk demands, "Does the accused have anything to say?" When I answer that I do, everyone sits down. I ask for a glass of water, and after a brief commotion they bring me one. Raising the glass, I take a sip, and finishing with a loud and prolonged gargle, I exclaim, "That's it!"

Someone from the jury harshly demands, "What do you mean, 'That's it'?"

"That's it," I repeat. But to satisfy the juror, I say that the water here does taste excellent, much better than I expected, and continue with two or three other pleasantries of this sort.

The court clerk finishes reading the document with these words: "Accordingly, the sentence shall be carried out today: You will be abandoned in the desert without food or water—above all, without water. I have spoken!"

"What do you mean, you have spoken?" I demand. Arching his eyebrows, the clerk only reaffirms, "What I have spoken, I have spoken!"

Soon I find myself riding in a fire truck through the middle of the desert, escorted by two firemen. We stop, and one of them says, "Get out!" As soon as I step down from the truck, the vehicle turns around and heads back the way it came. I watch it grow smaller and smaller as it moves off across the dunes.

The sun is setting, but the heat is still intense. I begin to feel very thirsty. Taking off my jacket and putting it over my head, I look around, and discover nearby a hollow beside a sand dune. I walk over and sit down in the meager patch of shade cast by the dune.

The wind begins to blow in strong gusts, raising a sandstorm that blots out the sun. Fearing I'll be buried if the wind grows any stronger, I leave the hollow. Staccato bursts of blowing sand sting my skin, and soon the force of the wind pushes me to the ground.

Now the storm has passed and the sun has set. In the twilight I see before me a whitish dome several stories high. Although I think it must be a mirage, I get to my feet and make my way toward it. As I draw closer, I see that the structure is made of a smooth material, a shiny plastic that seems to be inflated with air.

A man dressed in Bedouin garb greets me, and we enter the dome through a carpeted passageway. A door slides open, and I feel a refreshing rush of cool air. Once inside, I notice that everything is upside down—the ceiling is like a smooth floor from which things are suspended. I see round tables above us with their legs pointing up toward the ceiling. I see water falling downward in streams that curve and return upward, and high overhead there are human forms seated upside down.

Noticing my astonishment, the Bedouin hands me a pair of glasses saying, "Try these on!" When I put on the glasses, everything is restored to its normal appearance—in front of me I see a large fountain shooting streams of water high into the air. The tables and other objects are right side up, and everything is exquisitely coordinated in color and form.

I see the court clerk coming toward me, crawling on all fours. He says he feels terribly dizzy, so I explain to him that he's seeing reality upside down and needs to remove his glasses. Taking them off, he stands up and says with a sigh, "Indeed, now everything is fine—except that I'm so nearsighted." He goes on to say he has been searching for me in order to explain that there has been a most deplorable mistake, and I'm not the person who should have been put on trial at all. Immediately he leaves through a side door.

Walking a few steps, I find myself with a group of people seated in a circle on cushions. They are elders of both sexes, with varied racial features and attire. All of them have beautiful faces. Each time one of them begins to speak, I hear the sound of faraway gears, of gigantic machinery, of immense clocks. I hear intermittent thunder, the cracking of rocks, icebergs splitting off, the rhythmic roaring of volcanoes, the light impact of a gentle rain, the muffled beating of hearts—the motor, muscle, life—and everything in perfect harmony, a masterful symphony of sounds.

The Bedouin hands me a pair of headphones, saying, "Try these on, they translate." Putting them on, I clearly hear a human voice. I realize it is the same symphony of one of the elders, now translated for my clumsy ear. This time as he opens his mouth I hear, "We are the hours, we are the minutes, we are the seconds. We are the various forms of time. Because a mistake was made with you, we will give you the opportunity to begin your life anew. But from what point do you wish to start again? Perhaps from your birth, or perhaps from just before your first failure. Reflect on this." (*)

I try to determine exactly when it was that I lost control of my life, and I tell the elder what happened. (*)

"Very well," he says, "and what are you going to do, if you return to that moment, in order to follow a different course this time? Bear in mind that you still won't have any way of knowing what lies in your future.

"There is another alternative," he adds. "You can return to the moment of the greatest mistake in your life, and without changing the events themselves, you can nevertheless change their meanings. In this way you can make a new life for yourself."

As the elder falls silent, I see everything around me reversing in light and color, as if changing into the negative of a film. Then everything returns to normal, except that now I find myself back in time at the moment of the greatest mistake of my life. (*)

Here I am, driven to make this mistake. But what is compelling me to do it? (*)

Aren't there other factors influencing this, which I do not wish to see? What things are steering me toward this fundamental mistake? What should I try to do instead? If I don't commit this error, will this change the pattern of my life? And will the change be for better or for worse? (*)

I try to understand that the circumstances surrounding this moment cannot be changed, and I accept everything that happened as if it were a natural disaster, like an earthquake or a flood that destroys people's homes and livelihoods. (*)

I strive to accept that in such accidents, no one is to blame. My weaknesses, my excesses, the intentions of others—in this case none of these can be changed. (*)

I know that if I don't make peace now by reconciling with this mistake, my future life will only be filled with more of the same frustration. And so, with all my being, I forgive the others involved, and I forgive myself. I accept everything that happened as something beyond my control, and beyond the control of others. (*)

The scene begins to transform, light and dark again reversing as in the negative of a photograph. At the same time I hear a voice say, “If you can make peace with yourself, reconciling with your greatest mistake, your frustration will die and you will be able to change your destiny.”

Now I’m standing in the middle of the desert again, and see a car approaching. “Taxi!” I shout, and soon find myself seated comfortably in the back seat. Looking at the driver, who is dressed as a fireman, I say, “Please drive me home, and take your time, so I can think about everything that has happened.” Putting on my jacket again, I say to myself, “Who hasn’t experienced some kind of accident? Now I realize I am better than I thought I was, and best of all, I have a future in which to prove it.”

IV. Nostalgia

The colored lights pulse to the rhythm of the music, as I stand face-to-face with the one who was my greatest love. We dance slowly, and each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face, or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

Again I dance slowly, but now with another great love. Each flash of the lights reveals some detail of my love's face, or body. (*)

What went wrong between us? Perhaps it was money. (*)

Perhaps it was those other relationships. (*)

Perhaps it was having different goals. (*)

Perhaps it was destiny, or something impossible to grasp then. (*)

I forgive you and I forgive myself, for if we dance and the world dances around us, what can we do with those rock-solid promises that turned out to be butterflies of changing colors?

I rescue what is good and beautiful from my yesterdays with you. (*)

And from my yesterdays with you. (*)

And from my yesterdays with all who have dazzled my eyes. (*)

Ah—the pain, the suspicion, the parting, and then the wounded pride and endless sadness—these are the excuses. But how small they seem beside those beguiling eyes.

Because the great wrongs I remember are errors made in dancing, and not the dance itself.

I'm thankful to you for your tender smile.

And I'm thankful to you for your softly-whispered words.

And to all of you, I'm thankful for the hope of an everlasting love.

At peace with yesterday, my heart is open to the memories of those beautiful moments. (*)

V. My Ideal

I am walking through a fairground filled with exhibition halls and displays, and I see many children playing on high-tech mechanical rides.

I come upon a giant figure made of some solid material. It stands upright, and its large head is painted in bright colors. There is a ladder extending up to its mouth, which the little ones climb to reach the enormous opening. Whenever one enters, the mouth gently closes, and soon the child pops out the back of the giant, coming down a slide and landing in the sand below. One by one the children go in and come out, as a song flows from the giant:

See Gargantua gobble up the children,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

I decide to climb up the short ladder. As I enter the huge mouth, I meet an attendant who tells me, “Children go down the slide, but grownups use the elevator.”

The attendant continues the explanation as our elevator descends through a transparent tube. Soon I say that I think we’re probably at ground level by now.

“That’s right,” replies the attendant, “although we’re still only passing through the esophagus. The rest of the giant’s body is below ground, unlike the children’s giant, which is completely on the surface. You see,” my guide informs me, “there are actually two Gargantuas in one—one for children, and another one for grownups.”

After a while the attendant announces, “Now we’re well below ground. We’ve already passed the diaphragm, and soon we’ll stop at a very pleasant place—look, the elevator door is opening and I can show you the stomach. Would you like to get out here? As you can see, this modern restaurant serves delicious foods from all over the world.” But I tell the attendant that I’m curious about the rest of the body, and we continue going down.

“Now we’ve reached the lowest part of the abdomen,” announces my guide as the elevator door opens. “The decor here is quite unique, and the walls of changing colors form delicately lined caverns. In the middle of the lounge is the central fire, the generator that provides energy to the whole giant. There are seats for visitors to rest, and the columns scattered here and there are great for playing hide-and-seek—it’s easy to hide and then suddenly reappear. And the more visitors who play, the more fun it is. Now I’ll leave you here, if you wish. To return to the surface, all you need to do is approach the elevator and the door will open and take you back up. Everything is automatic—amazing, isn’t it?”

The elevator door closes, and I’m left alone in the lounge.

At first it seems as though I’m under the ocean. Then a large fish swims right through me, and I realize that the coral, the seaweed, and all the different species of living things are incredibly realistic three-dimensional projections. I sit down to watch this relaxing spectacle at my leisure.

Suddenly I see emerging from the central fire a human figure, its face covered. Approaching me slowly, the figure stops nearby and says, “Hello there, I’m a hologram. Everyone tries to find in me that special someone, their ideal match. I’m programmed to take on any appearance you wish. So tell me, what does your ideal look like?

“Before I can begin to look like your ideal, it will take just a little effort on your part. If you try this, your brain waves will be deciphered. Then they’ll be amplified, transmitted, and recoded again in the main computer, and as the computer rearranges the hologram, you’ll see my identity take shape.”

“What should I do?” I ask.

“I suggest that you follow these steps,” the figure says. “First, begin to think of the different people you’ve been emotionally involved with, and recall which features they’ve had in common. I don’t mean only their bodies or faces, but also their characters. For example, were they protective, or did they inspire you to be protective of them? (*)

“Were they brave or timid? Were they dreamers? Were they ambitious, deceitful, or perhaps cruel? (*)

“And now, what unpleasant or negative trait did they have in common? (*)

“What were their positive qualities? (*)

“How were the beginnings of all these relationships similar? (*)

“How were the endings similar? (*)

“Try to remember the people you’ve wanted to have relationships with, but things didn’t work out—and why didn’t they work out? (*)

“Now, give me your attention, and I’ll begin to take on the appearance you most desire. Just say the word, and I’ll become the person who is, for you, perfect. I’m ready, so go ahead and let yourself imagine. How should I walk? How am I dressed? Just what am I doing? How do I speak? Where are we, and what are we doing?

“Look into my face, just as it is! (*)

“Look deeply into my eyes, for now I’m no longer just a hologram, I’ve become real. Gaze deeply into my eyes, and tell me tenderly what you see in them.” (*)

I stand up to touch the figure, but it eludes me, disappearing behind a column. When I reach the spot, I find that the figure has vanished. But then I feel a hand resting softly on my shoulder as a voice says, “Do not look behind you. It should be enough for you just to know we’ve been so close to one another, and this experience can bring you greater clarity in searching for your ideal.”

As the voice finishes speaking, I turn to see who is behind me, but glimpse only a fleeting shadow. At the same time, the central fire roars and flares brightly, dazzling me.

I know that this setting and the hologram have created a favorable atmosphere for my ideal to appear. But through an impatience I do not understand, my ideal, which is within me and has softly brushed against me, my ideal has slipped through my fingers, only to disappear. Still I know that we’ve been near each other, and this is enough for me—I realize that the main computer could never have projected a tactile sensation like the touch I felt on my shoulder.

I approach the elevator, and as the door opens, I hear a children’s song:

See Gargantua gobble down the grownups,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

VI. Resentment

It is night, and I am in an old city crisscrossed by canals that pass beneath timeworn bridges. Leaning on a railing, I gaze at the slow movement of the murky liquid mass below. Through the fog I can make out a group of people on another bridge, and I can faintly hear musical instruments that accompany voices sadly out of tune. Faraway bells toll to me in haunting waves of sorrow.

Now the group has gone and the bells have fallen silent. Down a narrow diagonal street, colored neon lights emit a sickly glow.

I move on, once again entering the fog. After wandering aimlessly down side streets and over bridges, I come out into the open space of an old square paved with tiles. The square seems empty, and the tiled surface draws me toward one end that is submerged in still water.

Ahead, a boat that looks like a hearse awaits me. But to reach it, I must first pass between two long lines of women dressed in black tunics and holding torches overhead. As I pass, they say in chorus:

Oh Death! Whose unlimited domain
Reaches the living wherever they may be,
On you depends the span allotted to our life.
Your endless sleep annihilates the multitudes,
For no one escapes your powerful presence.
You alone have the judgment that absolves,
And no art can prevail upon your fury,
Nor plea revoke your design.

I step into the boat, aided by the boatman, who remains standing behind me. Settling into the spacious seat, I notice that the craft rises slightly until we're just above the water. Then we begin to move, suspended above an open and immobile sea that is like an endless mirror reflecting the moon.

We arrive at an island, and in the dim light I can see a long road bordered by cypress trees. The boat rests on the water, rocking gently, and I step out while the boatman remains behind, impassive.

I walk down the road between the trees, which sigh in the wind. I feel that I'm being observed, and I stop, sensing something or someone hidden up ahead. From behind a tree a shadowy figure beckons me with slow gestures. I begin to approach, and just as I reach it, a grave whisper like the sigh of death brushes against my face.

"Help me!" the shadow moans, "I know you have come to free me from this confusing prison. Only you can do this—help me!"

The shadowy figure tells me it is someone toward whom I bear a deep resentment. (*)

As though reading my thoughts, the voice adds, "It does not matter whether the person to whom you are bound by this most profound resentment is dead or alive, for the domain of dark memory respects no borders.

"Nor does it matter," the shadow continues, "whether the hatred and desire for revenge have been knotted in your heart since childhood, or began only yesterday. Here, time is immobile. This is why we are always lurking in the shadows, only to emerge again at any opportunity,

transformed into your various fears. And these fears are our revenge for the poison we must continually taste."

Just as I ask what I should do, a ray of moonlight faintly illuminates the figure's cloaked head. Then the specter allows me to see it clearly, and I recognize the features of the person who has wounded me most deeply. (*)

I tell the specter all about my resentment, expressing things I've never told anyone—I speak as frankly as I can. (*)

The apparition asks me to consider the problem once again, and to communicate everything that is important, even if my words are insulting. The shadow insists that I not fail to express any bitterness I feel, lest it remain imprisoned forever. So I go ahead and follow these instructions. (*)

The specter shows me a strong chain that binds it to a cypress tree. Without hesitating, I break the chain with a single sharp jerk. The cloak collapses and lies spread out on the ground, as the shadow vanishes into thin air and the voice recedes toward the heights, repeating these familiar words: "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell, farewell. Remember me!"

Realizing that daybreak will soon arrive, I turn to go back to the boat, but first I pick up the cloak, which is lying at my feet. Draping it over my shoulders I hurriedly retrace my steps. On my way back to the sea, several furtive shadows ask me if I'll return someday to free other resentments.

Near the shore I see a group of women dressed in white tunics and holding torches overhead. When I reach the boat, I hand the cloak to the boatman. He in turn passes it to the women, and one of them sets it afire. The cloak flares up and is quickly consumed by the flames, without leaving a trace. At this moment I feel a tremendous relief, as though I've sincerely forgiven an enormous wrong. (*)

I step into the boat, which now looks like a modern speedboat. As we push off from the shore, not yet starting the motor, I hear the chorus of women say:

You have the power to awaken us from our stupor,
Uniting heart with head,
Freeing our minds from emptiness,
Removing darkness and forgetfulness from inner sight.
Come, beneficial power: True memory
That straightens life into its rightful meaning.

The motor comes to life just as the sun appears above the ocean's horizon. The boat accelerates, and I look at the young driver, his strong, clear face smiling toward the sea.

We approach the city swiftly, bouncing lightly on the smooth swells. The sun's golden rays gild the magnificent domes of the city, while bright flocks of doves circle overhead.

VII. The Protector of Life

I am floating on my back in a lagoon. The water feels very pleasant, and effortlessly looking on either side, I discover that I can see the bottom through the crystalline water.

The sky is a brilliant blue. Close by, washed by the waters of the sea, is a beach of soft, almost white sand that forms a quiet inlet without waves.

I feel my body floating gently, becoming more and more relaxed, filling me with an extraordinary sensation of well-being.

I decide to turn over, and begin to swim with smooth strokes until I reach the beach, where I slowly emerge from the water.

The landscape is tropical. I see date and coconut palms, and feel the warmth of the sun and the soft breeze on my skin.

To my surprise, on my right I discover the entrance to a grotto with a stream of clear water flowing nearby. As I approach the grotto, I see a woman standing inside. A crown of flowers adorns her head and I can see her beautiful eyes, but I cannot tell her age. Yet behind her face, which radiates kindness and understanding, I sense there lies a great wisdom. As I gaze at her, all of nature falls silent.

“I am the Protector of Life,” she says. Hesitantly I answer that I do not understand what she means. At this moment a fawn approaches and licks her hand.

She invites me to enter the grotto and has me sit on the sand facing a smooth rock wall. I cannot see her now, but I hear her say, “Breathe gently, and tell me what you see.” I begin to breathe slowly and deeply, and immediately a clear image of the ocean appears before me on the rock. As I breathe in, the waves roll onto the beach. As I breathe out, the waves recede.

Then she tells me, “Everything in your body is rhythm and beauty. So many times you have despised your body, without comprehending this marvelous instrument you have for expressing yourself in the world.” At this moment many scenes from my life begin to appear on the rock wall—I see myself feeling shame, fear, and horror about certain aspects of my body. These images follow one after another. (*)

I feel uncomfortable when I realize that she is watching these scenes, but immediately calm myself. Then she adds, “Even in sickness and old age, your body will be like a faithful dog that accompanies you until the final moment. Do not despise your body when it cannot fulfill all your whims. Meanwhile make it strong and healthy. Take care of your body so that it can serve you well, and be guided in this only by the opinions of those who are wise. I who have passed through all the ages know well that the idea of beauty is ever-changing. If you do not regard your body as your closest friend, it will become sad and ill—therefore you must accept it completely. It is your instrument for expressing yourself in the world.

“I want you to see now the part of your body that is weakest and least healthy.” At once the image of this part of my body appears. (*)

The Protector of Life rests her hand on this area, and I feel a life-giving warmth. I sense waves of energy expanding in this area, and I experience a profound acceptance of my body, just as it is. (*)

“Take care of your body, following only the opinions of those who are wise, and do not harm it with illnesses that exist only in your imagination. Now go, filled with vitality and at peace with yourself.”

Upon emerging from the grotto, strengthened and healthy, I drink the crystalline water of the stream and feel completely renewed.

The sun and the wind caress my body as I cross the white sand toward the lagoon. When I reach the water, for an instant I glimpse in the depths the kind reflection of the Protector of Life.

As I enter the water, I give thanks within myself for my body, this marvelous instrument I have received from nature. (*)

VIII. The Rescue

I am in a car that is speeding down a large highway. In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk. The driver beside me is someone I've never seen before. In the back seat are two women and a man, who are also strangers to me. The car races onward, surrounded by other cars that are driving recklessly, as if their drivers are drunk or crazy.

I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, "Rex voluntas!"

Turning on the radio, which blares noisy static, I can faintly hear a weak metallic voice monotonously repeating, "Rex voluntas… rex voluntas… rex voluntas…"

The traffic slows, and by the roadside I see wrecked and overturned cars with fire spreading among them. We stop, and abandoning the car, join a sea of terrified people rushing toward the fields.

Looking back through the smoke and flames, I see many hapless souls who are trapped and doomed, but I'm forced to keep running by the human stampede that pushes me along. Some of the people stumble to the ground, and amid this delirium I struggle in vain to reach a woman trying to shield her child as the mob tramples over them.

The chaos and violence are spreading everywhere, so I make up my mind to move in a slightly diagonal direction that will let me escape the crowd; I aim toward some higher ground that diverts this mindless stampede. Many of the fallen clutch at my clothes, tearing them to shreds. But I notice that the crush of people around me is growing less.

Finally I manage to break free of the crowd, and almost out of breath continue to climb. Stopping for a moment, I notice that the mob is now going in a direction opposite to mine—they must be thinking that running downhill will carry them more quickly out of this crisis.

I realize with horror that the path they are following ends in a cliff. Shouting with all my might, I try to warn the people of this imminent catastrophe, though I fear that only those nearest me will hear the warning.

One man does break free of the mob and comes running toward me. His clothes are in tatters and his body is covered with wounds, yet I feel a great joy that he's been saved. On reaching me he clutches my arm, and yelling like a madman points frantically down the hill. He's speaking a language I do not understand, but I think he wants me to help rescue someone. I tell him to wait for a while—that right now it's impossible. I know he cannot understand me, and his desperation is tearing me apart. Then he tries to go back down, but just as he's leaving I trip him and he falls headlong. He lies sprawled on the ground, sobbing bitterly. For my part I realize that I've saved both his life and his conscience—his conscience because he did try to rescue someone, and his life by preventing his doomed attempt.

Climbing higher, I reach a freshly plowed field. The earth is loose and furrowed. In the distance I hear gunfire, and think I know what is happening—hurriedly I leave. After a while, everything is silent and I stop once more. Looking back toward the city, I see a sinister glow.

I feel the ground begin to shake beneath my feet, and a rumbling from the depths warns me of an imminent earthquake. Within moments I've lost my balance and find myself lying on the ground. Curled on my side and gazing up at the sky, I'm overcome by waves of dizziness.

The earthquake passes, and I look up to see an enormous, blood-red moon.

The heat is unbearable and the air is filled with an acrid odor. Meanwhile, I'm still uncertain whether the day is just beginning or night is falling.

Sitting down, I hear a growing roar. Soon hundreds of aircraft fill the sky, passing overhead like deadly insects and disappearing toward some unknown destiny.

Nearby I come upon a large dog that is staring up at the moon. It begins to howl, almost like a wolf. I call out to it, and the animal approaches me timidly. When it reaches my side, I gently pet its bristling fur and see shivers running down its body.

The dog pulls away from me and begins to leave. I get to my feet and follow it, and we cross a rocky area until we reach a small stream. The thirsty animal rushes forward and eagerly begins to drink, but all at once draws back and falls over. Approaching the dog I touch it, and realize that it's dead.

I feel a new earthquake, which threatens to knock me over, but it subsides.

Turning around, I behold far off in the sky four enormous clouds advancing toward me with the muffled rumbling of thunder. The first cloud is white, the second is red, the third is black, and the fourth is yellow. And these clouds are like four armed horsemen riding on the storm, traveling across the heavens and laying waste to all life upon the earth.

I begin running to escape the approaching clouds, for I realize that if their rain touches me I'll be contaminated. As I run toward the highway, suddenly my path is blocked by a gigantic figure—towering over me I see a huge robot swinging a sword of fire in a menacing arc. I shout that I must keep going because the radioactive clouds are approaching, but the robot replies that it has been stationed here to prevent destructive people from entering; adding that it's armed with lasers, it warns me not to come any closer. I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life.

So I shout to the robot, "You must let me pass because I've done a good deed!"

"What is a good deed?" the robot asks.

"A constructive action, something that builds and contributes to life," I answer.

"Then tell me what you've done that's so good," the robot demands.

"I've saved a human being from certain death, and what's more, I've saved his conscience as well."

At once the giant robot stands aside, and I leap into the protected area just as the first drops of poisoned rain begin to fall.

Ahead of me is a farm, and a soft light glows through the windows of the nearby farmhouse. Only now do I realize that the day is just beginning.

When I reach the farmhouse, a rugged yet kindly-looking man invites me to come in. Inside, a large family is preparing for the activities of the day. They seat me at the table, which is set with simple and hearty food. Soon I find myself drinking pure spring water, as children play around me.

"This time," says my host, "you have escaped. But when once again you must cross the border between life and death, what coherent behavior will you be able to show in your life?"

I ask him to explain, because his words sound strange to me. He says, "Try to remember the truly unselfish things you've done in your life, which we might call 'good deeds' to give them a name. Of course, I don't mean those so-called 'good deeds' people do when they're expecting something in return. Think only of the things you have done that left a clear sensation in you that the way you treated others was best for them—it's just as simple as that.

"Now I'll give you three minutes to review your life and see what inner poverty there is within you, my good friend. And one final suggestion: If you have children or loved ones, do not confuse what *you want* for them with what is best for *them*." Having said this, he leaves the house along with all of his family. I'm left alone to meditate on his suggestions. (*)

Returning a short time later, he says to me, "Now you see how empty you are within, and if you aren't empty, it's only because you are confused. That is, in either case you are empty. Let me give you some advice, and heed it carefully, for it is the only thing that will help you in what is to come: From now on, do not let a single day pass without filling your life with an unselfish act."

We say farewell, and in the distance I hear him shout to me, "Tell the people what you have discovered!"

I set off from the farm in the direction of my city.

Today I have learned this: When human beings think only of their own self-interest and their own problems, they carry death in their hearts, and everything they touch dies with them.

IX. False Hopes

I have arrived outside the office of the doctor who was recommended to me, and I notice a small plaque that warns: “You who enter here, abandon all hope.”

When I ring the bell, the door opens and a nurse shows me into the waiting room. She points to a chair and I take a seat, as she sits down facing me behind her desk. Picking up a form, she inserts it in her typewriter and asks, “Name?” I answer her. “Age? Profession? Marital status? Blood type?”

The nurse continues filling in the form with my family’s medical history.

Then I answer her questions about my own medical history. (*)

I describe for her all the accidents I have had since my childhood. (*)

With a piercing stare, the nurse slowly inquires, “What is your criminal record?” I answer her with a certain uneasiness.

Then she asks, “What are your hopes and dreams?” Abruptly I stop my obedient answers to her questions and demand an explanation. Unperturbed, and staring at me coldly as if I were an insect, she replies, “Hopes and dreams are merely hopes and dreams! So you’d better start telling me yours, and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my boyfriend.”

Rising out of my chair, with one swipe I rip the form from her typewriter. Tearing it to pieces, I throw it in the wastebasket. Then I turn and cross the room to the door through which I entered, but now it won’t open. Exasperated, I yell at the nurse to open it, and when she doesn’t answer I turn and see that the room—is empty!

Striding to the other door, which leads to the examination room, I feel sure that the doctor will be there and I’ll tell him all of my complaints. “This must be how that wonderful nurse escaped,” I mutter as I open the door—and manage to stop myself just short of a wall. “A door with a wall behind it, what a great idea!” I exclaim. Then I rush back to the first door. This time it opens, but again I run into a wall that blocks my way. I realize that I’m trapped.

Over a loudspeaker I hear the doctor’s voice say, “Tell me about your hopes and dreams.” Regaining my composure, I testily reply that we’re all adults here, and obviously my greatest hope is simply to get out of this ridiculous predicament. But he says, “The plaque on the wall at the entrance warns anyone who enters here to abandon all hope.”

The situation now seems to be some kind of grotesque joke, so I sit down to see how it will turn out.

“Let’s begin again,” says the voice. “Remember how your childhood was filled with hopes and dreams. As time passed, however, you realized that many of them were never going come true. So you abandoned those beautiful projects. Remember? (*)

“Later on,” the voice continues, “other hopes and dreams followed, and again you had to resign yourself to the fact that many of your desires would not come true. Remember? (*)

“Even at this very moment, you have certain hopes and dreams. I don’t mean your hope of escaping this confinement, for the illusion we’ve staged here is already over. I’m speaking of something else. I am speaking about your hopes and dreams for the future. (*)

“Which of your hopes do you secretly know will never come true? Go ahead, think this over honestly. (*)

“Without hopes and dreams, we cannot live. But once we know that certain hopes are false, we can’t hold on to them forever, because sooner or later they’ll end in crisis and failure. If you

can search deep within yourself and find the hopes you realize will never come true, and if you make the effort to abandon these hopes here forever, you will gain a greater sense of reality.

"So let's return to our task. Seek out among your fondest hopes and dreams those you sense will never come true. But don't be confused, for there are many things that do seem possible! Do not focus on these—choose only those hopes and dreams that will never be realized. Go ahead now, search out your false hopes. Be completely honest with yourself, even if it's a bit painful. (*)

"Resolve that when you leave this room, you will leave your false hopes behind forever. (*)

"And now, let's finish this task. Let's study those other important hopes—the hopes and dreams you do consider possible. I'll give you some help: Guide your life only by what you believe is possible, or what you genuinely feel will come true. And it doesn't matter if later on some of these things don't work out, because they have, after all, given direction to your actions. (*)

"And so, we have finished. You can leave now by the way you came in—and be quick about it, because I have to go meet my secretary."

I get up. Walking the few steps to the door, I open it and leave the doctor's office. Looking at the plaque near the entrance, I see that it now reads, "You who leave, abandon here all false hopes."

X. Repetitions

It is night, and I'm walking down a dark, narrow alley. I don't see anyone, but through the fog I can make out the faint glow of a distant streetlight. My footsteps resound with an ominous echo. I quicken my pace, intent on reaching the streetlight ahead.

As I approach the light, a few steps away I see a human silhouette. It is an old hag, her face half-covered. Abruptly, in a raspy voice, she asks me the time. Peering at my watch, I answer, "It's three in the morning."

I walk away quickly, once more entering the fog and darkness, anxious to reach the next streetlight, which I see in the distance.

But there, once again, is the old hag. Looking at my watch, I see it now says two-thirty. I begin running toward the next streetlight, looking back over my shoulder and making sure I'm leaving the old woman behind, as she stands motionless in the distance. But when I rush up to the next streetlight, again I see her dark shape awaiting me. I look at my watch—it says two o'clock.

I begin running frantically, passing streetlights and old women until, exhausted, I can go no farther and stop midway between two glowing lights. Looking at my watch, I see in its crystal the face of the old woman. I realize that the end has come.

In spite of everything, I try to understand my predicament. I ask myself over and over again, "What am I running away from? What am I running away from?" The raspy voice answers me, "I am behind you and I am ahead of you. What has been, will be. But you are most fortunate, for you have been able to stop yourself and think for a moment. If you find the answer to this riddle, you will be able to escape from your own trap." (*)

I feel dazed and weary. Still, I think there must be a way out. Something makes me begin to remember various failures in my life. I recall the first disappointments of my childhood. (*)

Then I remember the failures of my youth. (*)

Now I recall my more recent failures. (*)

I realize that my defeats will keep repeating in the future, failure upon failure. (*)

All of my defeats have had something similar about them—there was no agreement among the things I wanted to do. They were confused desires that wound up at odds with each other. (*)

I discover that even now many of the things I desire to achieve in the future are contradictory. (*)

I don't know what to do with my life, yet in my confusion I still want many things.

But I fear the future and worry that my previous failures will happen again.

Here in the fog of this narrow alley, my life is paralyzed between dying glimmers of light.

Suddenly a light goes on in a window and a voice calls out to me, "Is there something you need?"

"Yes!" I answer, "I need to get out of here!"

"Oh no—by yourself you cannot get out!"

"Then tell me, how do I get out of here?"

"I can't tell you. Besides, if we keep on shouting we're going to wake up all the neighbors. And we can't take chances with the neighbors' sleep! So good night."

The light goes out, and then I'm filled with one overwhelming desire—I must get out of this trap. I realize that my life will change only if I find a way out of here. This narrow alley appears to have direction and meaning, but is really only a repetition from birth to death—a false meaning. I will end up running from streetlight to streetlight until, at some moment, my strength becomes exhausted forever.

To my left I see a signpost with three arrows. The arrow for this alley bears the name, "Repetitions in Life." The second arrow points toward "Denial of Life," and the third marks the direction of "Building Life." For a moment I reflect on this choice. (*)

I choose the direction of the third arrow, "Building Life." As I leave the dark alley and emerge onto a broad and brightly lit avenue, I have the strong sense that I'm about to discover something of decisive importance.

XI. The Journey

I am climbing along a mountain path, and stop briefly to look behind me. In the distance I see the thin line of a river and what could be a grove of trees. Farther off, the reddish desert disappears into the haze of the late afternoon.

I walk a few more steps, and the path narrows until it disappears. I know that I still have the last and most difficult stretch ahead of me before I reach the plateau on top. The snow on the ground scarcely hinders my steps, and I continue my ascent.

I come to a rock wall. Studying it carefully, I discover a large crevice that I think I can climb. I begin to climb it, wedging my hiking boots into the footholds. Pressing my back against one side, I lever myself up with one elbow and my other arm. Slowly I inch higher.

Now the crevice has narrowed. I look up and I look down. I've reached an impasse—it's impossible to move either up or down.

I shift my position until I'm facing the wall, flattening myself against the slippery rock face. Planting both feet firmly, I slowly stretch one arm upward. I can feel my moist breath reflecting from the smooth rock. I keep groping with my fingers, not knowing whether I'll find some small handhold. Gingerly I stretch out my other arm. Suddenly I feel myself swaying, and my head falls slowly away from the rock. My whole body follows, until I'm on the verge of falling backwards. But at the last second, I find a tiny crack and grasp it tightly with my fingers. Recovering my balance, I continue the ascent, making the final assault on the top without difficulty.

At last I reach the plateau. I stand up, and an endless prairie stretches before me. Taking a few steps forward, I turn around. Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in delicate hues. As I compare these two spaces, suddenly I hear a piercing sound. Looking up, I see a luminous disk hovering high overhead. Circling around, it begins to descend.

The disk lands close by. Moved by some inner call, I approach it without hesitation. As I enter the luminous object, it feels as if I'm passing through a curtain of warm air. I find myself inside a transparent bubble that's flattened on its base, and immediately my body feels lighter.

As though propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we're heading toward the star Beta Hydris, or perhaps the galaxy NGC 3621.

Fleetingly I see the late afternoon light on the prairie below. We climb at great speed as the sky turns black and the Earth slips away.

I can feel our velocity steadily increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color, until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness.

Directly ahead I see a single point of golden light, which steadily grows larger. As we approach, I see it is a vast ring that continues in a very long transparent tube. We enter the tube, and after a while come to a sudden stop, landing in an open area. Passing through the curtain of warm air, I leave the bubble.

I find myself between transparent walls, which shimmer in musical variations of color as I pass through them.

I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of

which direction I look on its surface, my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away.

Now I encounter a figure, apparently human, whose face I cannot see. This being extends a hand toward me, in which I see a radiant sphere. I begin to approach, and in an act of complete acceptance, I take the sphere and place it on my forehead. (*)

In total silence I feel something new coming to life within me. A growing force bathes my body in successive waves, as a profound joy fills my being. (*)

Somehow I know that even without words the figure is speaking to me, saying, "Return to the world with your forehead and your hands luminous." (*)

And so I accept my destiny, returning to the bubble, and through the vast ring to the stars, and the prairie, and the rock wall below. (*)

Finally, I am back on the mountain path, a humble pilgrim returning to my people. (*)

Filled with light, I return to the hours, to the daily routine, to the pain of humanity, and to its simple joys.

I, who give with my hands what I can, who receive both insults and the warmest of greetings, sing to the heart, which from the darkest abyss is reborn in the light of Meaning.

XII. The Festival

Lying in a bed, I gradually become aware that I'm in a hospital room. Faintly I hear the dripping of a faucet. I try to move my arms and legs and then my head, but they don't respond. It's an effort just to keep my eyes open.

I seem to hear someone at my bedside saying that fortunately I'm out of danger, and now it's only a matter of resting. Though confusing, somehow these words bring me great relief. My body feels heavy and drowsy, and grows more and more relaxed.

The ceiling is smooth and white. As each drop of water drips from the faucet, a ray of light flashes across the ceiling. One drop, one ray. Then another. Then many rays, and after this I see waves of light. The ceiling keeps on changing with the rhythm of my heart, perhaps an effect of the arteries in my head as blood pulses through them.

Now the rhythm outlines the face of a young person, who speaks to me saying, "Hey you, why don't you come with me?"

"Sure," I think, "why not?"

Up ahead is a music festival, and the sound of instruments floods with light a vast space carpeted with green grass and flowers.

Lying in the meadow facing the stage, I'm surrounded by an enormous sea of people. Happily there is plenty of space and no one is crowded. In the distance I see some childhood friends, and I can tell they are truly enjoying themselves.

I fix my attention on a flower, connected to its stem by a slender stalk that, within transparent skin, gleams a deep green. I reach out my hand, lightly running my finger along the polished fresh stem, barely disturbed by tiny knobs. Moving up through emerald leaves, I come to the petals, which open in a multicolored explosion. Petals like stained glass in a solemn cathedral, petals like rubies, petals like embers awakening into flame—and in this dance of hues, I feel the flower lives as if a part of me. (*)

The flower, disturbed by my touch, releases a sleepy drop of dew, barely clinging to the tip of a leaf. As it falls the drop vibrates, forming an oval as it lengthens. And now in the emptiness it flattens out, only to become round again, falling in endless time—falling, falling, through endless space. Finally, landing on a mushroom's cap, the drop rolls like heavy mercury, sliding to the edge. There, in a spasm of freedom, it hurls itself into a tiny pool, raising a tempest of waves that bathe an island of marble. (*)

Looking up, I see a golden bee coming to sip from the flower, and in this intense spiral of life I withdraw my disrespectful hand, removing it from that dazzling perfection.

My hand—I look at it astonished, as if seeing it for the first time. Turning it over, opening and closing its fingers, I see the crossroads on my palm. And I comprehend that in those many lines all the roads of the world converge. I feel that this hand and its deep lines do not belong to me, and I give thanks within myself for this feeling of not possessing my body.

Ahead the festival continues, and I know that this music connects me with that young woman gazing at her clothes, and that young man leaning against a tree and petting a blue cat.

I know that I have lived all this before, and I have known the tree's jagged outline, and the sharply defined volume of each thing. Once before I have seen the soft shapes of those ochre clouds, set like cardboard cutouts against the immaculate blue of the sky.

And I have also lived before this timeless feeling in which my eyes seem not to exist, for they see everything so clearly, as if they were not the eyes of everyday seeing, eyes that cloud reality. I feel that everything is alive and all is well, and that the music and the things have no names, and nothing can ever truly name them. (*)

In the velvet butterflies that flutter around me, I recognize the warmth of lips and the fragility of sweet dreams.

The blue cat comes toward me, and suddenly I become aware of something obvious—the cat moves by itself, without cables, without remote control. The cat does everything by itself, and this amazes me. In its perfect movements, behind its beautiful yellow eyes, I know there is a life, and that everything else is a disguise, like the bark of the tree, the butterflies, the flower, the mercurial dewdrop, the clouds like cutouts, the hand with its converging roads. For a moment I seem to communicate with something universal. (*)

But then a soft voice interrupts me just before I pass into another state of consciousness. “Do you believe this is how things really are?” whispers the stranger. “I tell you that things are not this way, nor the other way either. Soon you will return to your grey world—without depth, without joy, without volume. And you will believe that you have lost your freedom. For now you do not understand me because you lack the capacity to think as you wish. Your apparent state of freedom is only the result of the natural chemical processes in your brain. This happens to thousands of people, and I give advice to each of them. And now, good-bye.”

With this the kindly stranger disappears, and the whole landscape begins to spin into a light grey spiral, until the wavy ceiling appears once more. I hear the water dripping from the faucet, and realize that I’m lying back in the hospital room. I feel the dullness in my senses dissolving and try to move my head, and this time it responds, and so do my arms and legs. I stretch, and realize that I’m completely well. Leaping out of bed, I feel altogether refreshed, as though I have rested for years.

I go to the door of the room, open it, and, stepping into the hallway, walk quickly to the exit of the building. There I see a large open doorway, with many people passing through in both directions. I go down the steps and out onto the street.

XIII. Death

I find myself in total darkness. Somehow, I can tell that I'm in a theater. Slowly the lights come on, and I see that I'm on the stage.

On one side, the stage is set with burning torches, and toward the back is an enormous balance scale with two arms. I sense that the ceiling, which may be vaulted, is very high, because I can't see all the way up to it. Around the stage I can make out walls of stone, trees, and swamps, which seem to lead into dense jungle. I see human figures moving furtively in the shadows.

Suddenly, two hooded figures beside me seize my arms. Then a solemn voice asks me, "Where do you come from?"

I don't know how to answer, so I say that I come from "inside."

"What is this 'inside'?" the voice demands.

I venture this reply: "I live in the city. So for me this wilderness is 'outside.' But for people who live out here, the city is 'outside.' And since I live in the city, that is, 'inside,' that's why I say I come from 'inside,' and now I'm 'outside.'"

"What nonsense," says the voice. "You have entered our domain, and therefore you come from 'outside.' And where we are is not the wilderness, but rather your 'insides.' Can't you see that this is a theater? You have entered this theater, which, in turn, is in your city. And the city where you live is outside the theater."

"No," I answer, "the theater is part of the city where I live."

"Listen to me, insolent one," says the voice. "Let's stop this ridiculous discussion. To begin with, let me tell you that you no longer live in the city. You *used* to live in the city, and therefore that space—whether 'inside' or 'outside'—is something from your past. Here, you have entered another space-time. In this dimension, things work differently."

Suddenly, an old man appears before me, carrying a large, open container in his right hand. As he comes up to me, he reaches inside of me with his other hand, as if my body were made of butter. First, he removes my liver, and puts it in the container. Then he proceeds to take out my kidneys, my stomach, and my heart. Finally, in a most unprofessional way, he takes out everything else that he finds, until the container is filled to overflowing. All the while, I feel nothing unusual.

The old man then turns around and carries my viscera over to the balance, where he puts everything into a large pan that hangs from one arm of the scale. As he does so, the arm begins to tilt downward, until it comes to rest on the floor.

Now I seem to be in a butcher shop, where the different cuts of meat are weighed as the customers look on. Indeed, a lady carrying a shopping bag tries to take some of my internal organs from the pan. But the old man stops her, shouting, "Hey! Who said you could have any of that meat?" Then he climbs up a short ladder, until he can reach the empty pan hanging down from the other end of the balance, where he gently places an owl's feather.

Again I hear the voice, but this time saying these words to me, "Now that you are dead and have descended to the threshold of the world of shadows, you will say to yourself: 'My viscera are being weighed.' And you will be right—to weigh your viscera is to weigh your actions."

The hooded figures beside me let go of my arms, and I begin to wander slowly, in no particular direction.

The voice continues, “Your lower viscera are in the infernal fire. The keepers of the fire are always active, preventing those you desire from coming near.”

I realize that the voice is guiding my steps, and, with each suggestion, the scene changes.

The voice continues, “First you must pay the keepers. Then, enter the fire, and remember all the suffering that you have caused others in the chain of love.” (*)

“Ask forgiveness from those you have mistreated, and leave the fire only when you are reconciled with them. (*)

“Then, call by name those you have wronged, and beseech them to let you see their faces. If they agree, listen carefully to their advice, which is as soft as a faraway breeze. (*)

“Thank them with all your heart, and leave following the torch of your guide. Your guide will lead you through dark passageways, until you come to a chamber where shadows await you—the shadows of all those you have harmed in the course of your existence. They remain—all of them—in the same suffering condition as on the day you left them. (*)

“Ask their forgiveness, reconcile with them, and kiss them one by one before you leave. (*)

“Follow your guide, who knows well how to lead you to the places of your shipwrecks, to the places of things forever frozen. Oh world of great losses, where smiles and enchantments and hopes are your burden and your failure! Contemplate your long chain of failures, and to help you, ask your guide to slowly illuminate all those illusions. (*)

“Reconcile with yourself, forgive yourself, and laugh. Then you will see that from the cornucopia of dreams, a wind will blow, carrying the dust of your illusory failures to nothingness.” (*)

Suddenly the whole scene changes, and I find myself in different surroundings. I hear the voice say, “Even in the cold and dark forest you must follow your guide. Birds of ill omen will brush against your head. In the swamps, serpentine vines will hem you in.

“Have your guide lead you to the grotto. There you can go no farther until you pay the price to the hostile forms that guard the entrance. If, finally, you are able to enter the grotto, ask your guide to cast light to the left and to the right. Ask your guide to bring the torch close to the large marble bodies of the statues of all those you have never been able to forgive. (*)

“Forgive them one by one. And when your feeling is true, each statue will turn once more into a human being, who will reach out their arms to you, and smile in a hymn of gratitude. (*)

“Now, follow your guide out of the grotto, and do not look back for any reason.

“Leave your guide and return to where you began, where the actions of the dead are weighed.

“Look once more at the pan on the balance that contains your actions, and see how they rise—they are now lighter than a feather.”

I hear the metallic groan of the balance arm, and see the pan that bears my viscera rising upward.

The voice concludes: “You have forgiven your past. And you have achieved more than enough to think of going any further for now. Were your ambition to carry you beyond this point, it could happen that you might not return to the land of the living. You have gained more than enough with the purification of your past. I say to you now: Awake and depart from this place.”

Slowly, the lights on the stage dim, and I can tell that once more I am outside that world, and again a part of my everyday world. But I also realize that even in my daily world I still carry within me the experiences of that other world.

Part Two: Playing with Images

I. The Creature

It is night, and I find myself in total darkness. Somewhere nearby is the edge of a cliff. Groping ahead with my foot, I can feel uneven ground that is covered with vegetation and rocks. I also sense the presence of the creature that has always provoked in me a special feeling of terror and disgust. There may be one of them, or there may be many—but I'm certain that something is relentlessly drawing near.

A ringing in my ears, at times mingling with a faraway wind, contrasts with the utter silence. My wide-open eyes cannot see a thing. My heart is pounding, my breathing is shallow, and my dry mouth has a bitter taste.

Something is approaching—what is creeping up behind me, making my scalp bristle and sending cold chills up my spine?

My knees feel weak, and if something grabs me or jumps on me from behind I'll be completely defenseless. I'm paralyzed—all I can do is wait. In my confusion, I think about this creature and those other times when it was near me, especially about that most difficult time. I begin to relive those memories. (*)

What happened then? What was going on during that period of my life? I try to recall the fears and the frustrations I was feeling at that time. (*)

Clearly, I was at a crossroads in my life, and this coincided with my encounter with the creature—I feel an urgent need to discover how these things are related. (*)

Now I find that I can think more clearly again. While I know there are animals that provoke disgust in nearly everyone, I also recognize that not everyone loses control in their presence. I notice just how the terrifying creature makes me feel, and I try to discover the connection between this feeling and what was happening in my life at other times when I've felt similar fears. (*)

Calmly, I try to feel which part of my body I would protect from this dangerous animal. I realize this part of my body is related to the difficulties I was having when the encounter with the creature occurred, so long ago. (*)

Seeing the animal again has reawakened in me that moment of my life, a moment that is still not resolved. I need to shed light on that dark and painful time, which is sometimes difficult to recall. (*)

Above I see the clear night sky, and ahead on the horizon the rosy glow of a new dawn. Very quickly the day brings with it the stirring of life. Here in this soft meadow, I walk freely on a carpet of dew-covered grass.

A van approaches rapidly and stops beside me. Two people dressed as orderlies get out. Greeting me cordially, they announce that they've captured the creature that frightens me so much. They explain that when they receive a message of fear, they go hunting for the creature that is causing it. When they capture the animal, they display it so that the person who is afraid can study it closely. Now they place the carefully-restrained animal right in front of me.

The specimen is indeed helpless. I take advantage of this to examine it thoroughly, very slowly and from all angles, both up close and from a distance. (*)

The orderlies gently pet the docile animal, and it responds in a friendly way. Then they invite me to pet it, too. Feeling great apprehension, I shudder as I try to touch the creature. But I try again, and then again, until finally I'm able to pet it. (*)

The animal responds peacefully, with exceedingly lazy movements. Then it begins to shrink, growing smaller and smaller, until finally it disappears.

As the van departs, I try once again to recall the circumstances in my life long ago, when the presence of this animal so terrified me. (*)

On a sudden impulse I begin to run playfully, enjoying the morning and the fresh air. I move rhythmically and tirelessly, breathing deeply. Then I begin to run even faster, my heart and muscles working together like a flawless machine.

As I'm running freely I recall my fear, but feel that I am stronger now, and that soon I'll have conquered it forever.

Bright sunlight streams down from above as I swiftly draw near my city. Filling my lungs with air, I feel my whole body moving in perfect harmony. Those parts of my body that were prey to fear now feel strong and invulnerable. (*)

II. The Snowmobile

I am on a broad expanse of snow high on a mountain, and all around me I see people participating in winter sports. Despite the splendid sun, I become aware of the cold on seeing my breath in the air. From time to time icy gusts of wind strike my face, but this only feels invigorating.

Several of my friends approach, pushing a snowmobile. They urge me to get in and drive, explaining that this snowmobile has been so carefully designed that the driver can't lose control. I get in and buckle the seatbelt. Lowering my goggles, I start the turbines, which whine like small jets. As I press lightly on the accelerator with my right foot, the snowmobile moves gently forward. Easing back on the accelerator, I press the brake with my left foot, and the machine obediently stops. Then I turn the snowmobile effortlessly to the left and to the right.

Three of my friends leave ahead of me, gliding along on their skis. "Let's go!" they shout and take off downhill, leaving a zigzagging trail behind them as they descend the magnificent mountainside.

I press on the accelerator, and the snowmobile accelerates smoothly. As I start downhill behind the skiers, I see the beautiful landscape, covered with snow and evergreens. Farther down I see wooden cabins, and in the distance a valley bathed in sunlight.

Fearlessly I accelerate, and my friends greet me with shouts as I pass first one, then another, and finally the third. I head toward the pine trees that appear in my path, dodging between them with impeccable movements. Deciding to go even faster, I press the accelerator to the floor and feel the tremendous power of the turbines. Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud. The freezing wind stretches the skin of my face taut, and I can barely keep my lips together.

Ahead I see a wooden shelter that rapidly grows larger, and on either side of it is a ski-jump covered with snow. Without hesitating I head straight for the ramp on the left. In an instant I'm on it, and as I speed down the ramp I switch off the engines to prevent a fire upon landing.

Taking off, I'm catapulted upward in a fantastic flight, hearing only the roar of the wind as I begin to fall an enormous distance.

Approaching the snow, I can see that my angle of descent exactly matches the slope, and I touch down delicately on the smooth surface. Restarting the engines, I accelerate as I approach the valley floor.

I begin to apply the brakes, and raising my goggles, head slowly toward the hotel complex, from which a number of chairlifts carry skiers back up the mountainside.

Finally I enter a flat expanse of snow near the hotel. Ahead on my right I notice the black mouth of what looks like a train tunnel. Slowly I head toward it, crossing through pools of melted snow. Reaching the mouth of the tunnel, I check for train tracks or tire marks, but do not see any. Even so, I realize that large trucks may use it—perhaps it is a snowplow depot.

Whatever its purpose, I enter the tunnel cautiously. It is dimly lit, so I turn on the headlight. In the powerful beam I can see a straight road extending a great distance ahead of me. I speed up, and the sound of the jets reverberates as their echoes intermingle. Ahead I see that the tunnel curves, but instead of slowing down I go even faster—when I reach the curve, I slide up the wall and then down again, without mishap.

Next the road descends, and farther on curves upward, forming a huge spiral like a corkscrew or a coil in some immense spring. I accelerate, heading down at first and then up again—realizing for an instant that I'm speeding along the ceiling—only to descend in a long arc onto a level road once more.

Slowing down, I get ready to go down a drop as steep as on a roller coaster. I begin to plunge down the almost vertical incline. Gradually I apply the brakes, and finally slow down as I reach the bottom.

Now I see I'm coming to a narrow bridge that stretches through an endless void. On either side of the bridge there is utter darkness. Very slowly I follow the road straight onto the bridge, which is no wider than the snowmobile. I feel safe, however, because the bridge is solid. Looking ahead as far as the beam of the headlight extends, the road appears like a taut thread, completely removed from any ceiling, any floor, any wall—separated from everything by unfathomable distances. (*)

I stop the vehicle, intrigued by the effect of this scene. Calmly I begin to imagine different perils—the bridge breaking and myself falling into the void. Then I picture an enormous spider descending its thick silk thread, lowering itself toward me as if I were only a tiny fly. Finally I imagine a colossal cave-in, and long tentacles rising toward me from out of the inky depths. (*)

Though these scenes are frightening, I find that I have the inner strength to conquer my fears. So once again I try to imagine something dangerous or terrifying, and lose myself in these thoughts. (*)

Having faced these challenges, and feeling strengthened by this test I've imposed on myself, I restart the engines and accelerate. I finish crossing the bridge and come to a tunnel like the one I first entered. Traveling swiftly, I ascend a long slope until I reach ground level.

I see a circle of daylight that grows larger, until finally I shoot straight out onto the open expanse of the hotel complex.

Slowing down, I carefully avoid the people walking around me. I drive very slowly until I reach the far side of the area where it connects to the ski slopes.

Lowering my goggles, I begin to accelerate so I'll be going fast enough when I start up the mountain to reach the summit where my journey began—I go faster and faster, and then faster still.

I climb up the slope at the same breathtaking speed I had on my way down. I see the wooden shelter and the ski jumps rushing toward me, but realize that now the vertical wall below the ski jumps blocks my path to the slope above. Veering left, I pass beside the ski jumps and the wall, and continue up the slope.

Pine trees flash by like blurred shadows, as swirling snow floats behind in a fine white cloud.

Up ahead my three friends have stopped, and I see them greeting me with ski poles held high. I circle around them, covering them with a shower of snow, and continue up the mountain. When I reach the summit, I come to a stop and switch off the turbines. Removing my goggles, I unbuckle the seatbelt and climb out of the snowmobile, hardly feeling cold at all. I stretch my legs, and then my whole body. On foot once more, I head down the magnificent mountainside. I see the evergreens, and far off in the distance like a tiny irregular dot, I can see the hotel complex.

I enjoy the fresh mountain air and the sun warming the skin on my face, and I feel a strong sense of having gained greater control over my body. (*)

III. The Chimney Sweep

I am sitting in a room beside a person I've just met. I feel that he's completely trustworthy, however, for I can sense that he has all the qualities of a good advisor—kindness, wisdom, and strength. Notwithstanding these qualities, many people call him by the picturesque nickname "the Chimney Sweep."

I have come to consult the Chimney Sweep about some personal problems, and he tells me that I have so much inner tension it would be advisable to do a "cleansing" exercise.

The Chimney Sweep is very discreet, and because he is sitting beside me and not staring at me, I feel comfortable in expressing myself openly. It doesn't take long for us to establish a close rapport.

He asks me to relax completely and loosen any muscular tensions I may have. He helps me by placing his hands on my forehead, and then on the various muscles of my face. (*)

Gently taking my head in his hands, he rocks it left and right, forward and backward, helping me loosen my neck and shoulders. He emphasizes how important it is for me to relax my eyes and jaw. (*)

Next the Chimney Sweep recommends that I relax the muscles in my body—first my chest and stomach muscles, and then the muscles of my back. (*)

He explains that he hasn't been concerned with the tensions in my limbs because, he assures me, my arms and legs will relax by themselves as a result of what I've already done. He suggests that I let my body go limp, like rubber, becoming warm and heavy, until I feel a pleasant, floating sensation. (*)

Now the Chimney Sweep says to me, "Let's get right to the point. Tell me about this problem that's been bothering you so much, and tell me everything, right down to the last detail. Remember that I'm not here to judge you, but to help you. I'm your instrument, and not the other way around." (*)

"Think of something that you would never dream of telling anyone else, no matter what," he continues. (*)

"Now," he says, "begin to tell me all about it." (*)

"If you want to you can go ahead and tell me anything else it would do you good to get off your chest. Don't worry about the way you express yourself, and let your emotions flow freely." (*)

After a while the Chimney Sweep rises and picks up a very long, slightly curved pair of forceps. Standing in front of me he says, "Open your mouth!" When I do, I feel him insert the long instrument into my mouth, and it seems to reach all the way down into my stomach. To my surprise, however, I find that it's not too uncomfortable.

Suddenly he shouts, "I've caught it!" And little by little he begins pulling out the forceps. At first it feels like something is tearing apart inside of me. But then I feel a pleasant tingling sensation, as if something malignant is being pulled loose from my lungs and internal organs, something that has been stuck there for a long, long time. (*)

As he continues withdrawing the forceps, I'm amazed to feel coming out of my mouth a sweetish, foul-smelling, and slimy creature, writhing in the grasp of the forceps. Finally the Chimney Sweep places this disgusting creature into a clear jar, and I experience enormous relief, as if my body has been internally purified.

Standing up, I'm left speechless as I watch this repugnant "thing" begin to melt, turning into a shapeless, gelatinous mass. Within moments all that's left is a dark liquid. Then the liquid turns clear and evaporates, escaping invisibly into the air. In less than a minute the jar is left perfectly clean.

"Now you can see," says the Chimney Sweep, "why we call this procedure 'cleansing.' All in all, today hasn't been so bad. A little daily difficulty mixed with a bit of embarrassment, a dose of betrayal, and a dash of guilty conscience. The result—a little monster that prevented you from sleeping well, digesting your food, and from doing other good things. You should see the enormous monsters I sometimes extract. Oh, and don't worry if you feel an unpleasant sensation for a little while. Now I bid you farewell."

IV. Descent

We are in a boat at anchor on the sea. We begin to hoist the anchor, only to discover that it's caught fast. Telling my companions I'll go see what's wrong, I climb down a short ladder and enter the calm water.

Diving down, I see a school of small fish, the hull of the boat, and the anchor chain. I swim over to the chain and begin using it to pull myself down.

I notice that I can breathe normally, and continue to follow the chain down until I reach the dimly lit bottom. Here I find the anchor, but it's entangled in some metal wreckage. Grasping the chain, I pull sharply upward and see the bottom give way, raising a hidden cover to reveal a square opening. Entering the opening, I continue going down. (*)

I swim deeper and deeper until I feel a cold underwater current, and I swim in the direction of the current. After a while I come to a wall that is covered with patches of seaweed. Staying close to the smooth surface, I float upward, and notice that everything is becoming lighter. (*)

I emerge in a pool of water within a dimly lit cavern. Climbing out onto a kind of platform, I take a few steps and discover a stone stairway. Cautiously I begin to descend the stairs.

I see burning torches placed at regular intervals along the small passageway, which becomes even narrower as I go down the slippery steps. The stairs are almost vertical, and the air feels humid and suffocating. (*)

Now I come to an iron gate that blocks my way. I push against the rusty bars and the gate creaks open. Here the steps end and now there is only a muddy ramp. As I pick my way down the slick surface, a dank tomb-like odor fills the air. (*)

A sudden gust of wind threatens to extinguish the torches. At the bottom I can hear the roar of an angry sea crashing against the rocks. I begin to have doubts that I'll ever be able to get back.

Whistling loudly, the wind blows out the bottom torch, and I set out to climb back up, resisting my rising fears.

Slowly I ascend the muddy ramp until I reach the rusty gate—but again I find it is closed. Pulling open the gate, I wearily continue climbing the nearly vertical stairs, while behind me the torches keep going out. The stone stairs become increasingly slippery and I must step carefully.

At length I reach the cavern. I step onto the platform and submerge myself in the pool of water, just as the final torch is extinguished.

It is pitch black. Brushing against the smooth, seaweed-covered surface, I descend into the depths once more. (*)

Feeling the cold current, I swim against it with great effort. (*)

I escape the current, and swim upward until I encounter a stone ceiling—I search in every direction to find the square opening. (*)

At last I find the opening, and swim upward through it. Freeing the anchor from where it is caught, I plant my feet on top of it and pull on the chain to alert my companions.

I ride up on the anchor as they hoist it from above. While I'm rising toward the surface, I observe a fascinating rainbow of ocean life, and all around me the underwater space grows lighter.

Finally I reach the surface. Letting go of the anchor chain and grasping the ladder of the boat, I climb aboard to the cheers and greetings of my friends. (*)

V. Ascent

It is daytime when I enter the house and slowly begin climbing the stairs. I reach the second floor, and continue going upstairs until I come outside onto the flat rooftop. High overhead is a water tank atop a tower.

I see the metal spiral staircase that I must climb to reach the top of the water tank—but there is no handrail. Calmly I go up the spiral stairs.

Reaching the top of the tank, I stand up. The base of the tower is narrow and the whole structure sways with each gust of wind, but I maintain my footing. (*)

Venturing over to the edge of the tank, I look down and see the roof of the house beneath me. I'm drawn toward the empty space below, but I catch myself and continue looking down. Then I let my gaze wander over the landscape around me. (*)

Suddenly a helicopter appears overhead. As it approaches, I see a rope ladder with wooden rungs being lowered toward me. Grasping the ladder, I place both feet on the lowest rung, and slowly the ladder rises as the helicopter ascends. Below me the water tank grows smaller and smaller. (*)

I climb up the ladder until I reach the door of the helicopter. When I try to open it, I find that it's stuck. Then I look down. (*)

Suddenly the metal door slides open and the young pilot reaches out a hand to me. I climb into the helicopter, and we begin to gain altitude rapidly.

A voice announces that we're experiencing engine failure. I hear the grinding of broken gears and the main rotor stops—we begin falling, faster and faster.

The crew members pass me a parachute, and they leap out into space.

I'm perched in the edge of the doorway as the helicopter plunges earthward at a dizzying speed.

I make up my mind to jump, and fall face downward. I'm falling so fast it's difficult to breathe. I pull the ripcord, and the parachute streams upward in a long sheet overhead. With a strong jolt it opens, I bounce, and my fall slows dramatically.

I must land on top of the water tank, or else I'll fall into the high-tension wires, or the tops of the pine trees that await me like sharpened stakes. I maneuver the parachute by pulling on the canopy lines—fortunately I'm aided by the wind. (*)

The parachute envelops me as I land on top of the water tank and roll to the edge. Freeing myself, I see the parachute fall in a tangle. I get to my feet, and slowly begin to descend the spiral stairs.

When I reach the rooftop, I go down to the second floor, and unhurriedly continue going downstairs until I reach the room I first entered.

Once more on the ground floor of the house, I walk to the door, open it, and leave.

VI. The Costumes

I find myself standing naked in a nudist camp, and I can feel that I'm being closely observed by men and women of various ages.

Someone tells me these people are studying me because it's obvious to them I have certain problems. This person suggests that I cover up my body, so I put on a hat and some shoes. As soon as I do, the nudists lose interest in me.

I'm expected at a party soon, so I finish dressing and leave the nudist camp.

As I enter a large house, in the hallway I meet a fashionably dressed gentleman. He informs me that this is a costume party, and that to enter the ballroom I must be appropriately dressed. He directs my attention to one side, where I see a dressing room that is filled with exotic masks and costumes. Taking my time, I begin to choose carefully among them.

Before me are several mirrors set at angles, and as I try on different masks and costumes, I can see myself from all sides. First I try on the costume and the mask that look worst on me. (*)

Then I try on the best costume and the best mask, and study myself from all angles. Any imperfection I see is immediately corrected, until my whole costume is perfectly coordinated. (*)

Resplendent, I make my entrance into the grand ballroom where the party is going on. The room is filled with people, and all of them are wearing masks and costumes.

A hush falls over the crowd, and then everyone applauds my perfect costume. Urging me to go up on stage, they call for me to sing and dance—and so I do. (*)

Next the audience demands that I take off my mask and repeat my performance, but just as I'm about to, I realize I'm dressed in that hideous costume I tried on first. To make matters worse, my face is now exposed—I feel ugly and ridiculous. Nevertheless I sing and dance before the crowd, enduring their scornful jeers and whistles. (*)

Leaping onto the stage, a brash musketeer jostles and insults me. Much to his dismay, I begin to transform into an animal.

I continue changing into different animals, but always keeping my own face. First I am a dog, then a bird, and finally an enormous toad. (*)

At this point a chess piece, a rook, comes over to me and says, "You should be ashamed of yourself, frightening the children this way!" I return to my normal appearance, dressed in my usual clothing.

Now I find that I'm growing smaller—already I've shrunk to the size of a small child.

Stepping down from the stage, I look up at the enormous costumed people peering down at me from above. All the while, I continue growing smaller. (*)

Screaming hysterically, a woman cries out that I'm an insect. But just as she's about to squash me with her foot, I shrink to microscopic size. (*)

Quickly I grow back to the size of a child, and then to my normal size. I continue growing larger and larger while the crowd around me scatters, running in all directions.

My head now reaches the ceiling and I look down on everything from above. (*)

Recognizing the woman who tried to squash me, I pick her up in one hand and set her down on the stage as she screams hysterically.

Returning to my normal size, I decide to leave the party.

When I reach the hallway, I see a mirror that completely distorts my appearance. Then I rub the surface until the mirror reflects back to me that beautiful image I have always longed for. (*)

Giving my regards to the dapper fellow at the entrance, I leave the house at peace with myself.

VII. The Clouds

In total darkness I hear a voice that says, “In the beginning there was neither being nor nonbeing. There was neither air nor sky above, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. There were neither human beings nor animals, not even one bird, fish, or crab; no stones, caves, or cliffs; no prairies or forests. There were neither galaxies nor atoms—nor were there department stores. Then you were born, and sound and light began, and heat and cold, and rough and smooth.”

The voice falls silent, and I become aware that I’m going up the escalator in a huge department store.

I pass by several floors, and then I see the roof of the building opening above me. Slowly and effortlessly the escalator carries me up into the clear sky.

Down below I can see the building, looking very small. The sky is a deep blue. I feel the pleasant rippling of my clothes in the breeze, and with great serenity I take deep breaths of the fresh air.

Passing through a layer of fine mist, I encounter a sea of very white clouds.

The escalator gradually levels out, and I begin to walk on it as if it were a sidewalk. I move forward, and realize that I’m walking on a floor of clouds.

I can walk without effort, and gravity is so weak that I can leap long distances. Taking advantage of this, I flip head over heels, landing on my back and rebounding as if bouncing on a huge trampoline. I seem to move in slow motion, with perfect freedom. (*)

I hear the voice of an old friend greeting me, and see my friend running gracefully toward me. Coming together in an embrace, we roll over and over, bouncing and tumbling, laughing and singing. (*)

Finally we sit down, and my friend takes out a retractable fishing rod and extends it. For tackle, instead of a hook we tie on a horseshoe-shaped magnet. Then we let out the line, and the magnet descends through the floor of clouds.

After a while the pole begins to jerk and my friend exclaims, “I think we’ve caught something good!” Immediately we begin to reel in the line, and soon a large tray emerges, stuck to the magnet. The tray is filled with all kinds of food and drink, and everything is exquisitely arranged. Setting down the tray, we prepare for a great feast.

Every dish I taste has a delicious flavor. Even more remarkably, we can eat anything we want without gaining weight, and the food never runs out. All we have to do is wish, and new dishes appear to replace any we have eaten. I begin helping myself to all my favorite kinds of food, savoring every mouthful. (*)

At last, completely satisfied, we lie back on the soft mattress of clouds, enjoying an incredible sensation of well-being. (*)

My body feels warm and soft and completely relaxed, as gentle thoughts wander through my mind. (*)

I notice that I feel no sense of hurry or restlessness or any desire at all. I feel I have all the time in the world for myself. (*)

In this state of complete fulfillment and well-being, I recall the problems I had in everyday life. I feel able to handle these problems without undue tension, and clear objective solutions appear to me. (*)

After a while I hear my friend say, “It’s time for us to return.”

Standing up and taking a few steps, I realize I’m on the escalator again. It begins to slope gently downward, passing through the floor of clouds. I feel a fine mist as I begin going back down to the earth.

Approaching the building, the escalator enters the roof. As I descend past the different floors of the department store, all around me I see people worriedly trying to choose which objects they will buy.

I close my eyes and hear a voice say, “Then there was no fear, no worry, no desire, for time did not exist.” (*)

VIII. To and Fro

In a large, well-lit room, I walk a few steps to the door, open it, and go slowly down a hallway. Entering a door on my right, I discover a new hallway and begin walking down it. Entering a door on my left, I continue on. Entering a new door on my left, I continue walking. Then I go through still another door on my left and continue on.

Slowly retracing my steps, I return to the room where I began. (*)

On the right side of the room is a large sliding-glass door that opens onto a garden. Opening the door, I step outside. On the ground is a device that supports a steel wire, suspending it a short distance off the ground. The wire follows an erratic, zigzag path. Stepping onto the wire, I balance myself, taking one step, then another; without difficulty I walk along the straight sections, as well as the wire's twists and turns.

Walking backwards, I retrace my steps to the starting point. (*)

Stepping down from the wire, I return to the large room, where I find a full-length mirror. As I walk slowly toward the mirror, I observe that logically my image comes toward me. I keep going until I can touch the mirror. Then, still facing the mirror, I back away from it, observing that my image also moves away.

Again I approach the mirror until I can touch it, but this time discover that my image is moving away from me, until it disappears. Then I see my image coming toward me, walking backwards. It stops before reaching the mirror, turns on its heel, and comes the rest of the way toward me.

I go outside onto a courtyard made up of large tiles. In the center of the courtyard is a large armchair positioned precisely on top of a black tile. All the other tiles are white. Somehow I know that this chair has the power to move by itself—always facing the same way—in any of the four directions. Settling into the chair I say, "Three tiles forward." The chair moves three tiles forward. Then I say, "Four to the right. Two back. Two to the left. One back. Two to the left." And we end up on the black tile.

Now I say, "Three back. One to the right. One back. Four to the right. Four forward. Five to the left." We end up on the black tile.

Finally I say, "Three to the left. Two back. One forward. Two to the right. Three back. One to the right. Four forward." Again we end up where we started.

Getting up from the chair, I leave the house. As I stand in the middle of a large highway without a car in sight, I see someone I like very much coming straight toward me, until we're so close we're almost touching. (*)

The person then moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

I see someone I dislike intensely coming toward me until we're very close to each other. (*)

This person also moves away, receding into the distance and finally disappearing. (*)

Sitting down, I recall a very unpleasant scene in which I'm in front of other people. Then I walk away from them. (*)

Finally I recall a situation in which I'm having a lot of fun. I walk away from this situation, too. (*)

IX. The Miner

It is very early in the morning, and a light drizzle is falling from the leaden skies. I'm dressed as a miner, and standing with other miners as we wait for the mine elevator to arrive.

In the distance I see the black silhouette of the factory with its blast furnaces glowing. The chimneys belch fire, and smoke rises in thick columns. Above the slow and distant rhythm of the machinery, I hear a shrill siren that marks the change of shift.

I see the elevator coming up slowly. With a heavy shudder it stops at my feet, and we move forward until we're standing inside on the metal floor. The gate slides shut, and amid the murmur of voices we begin going down.

In the dim light of the elevator I can see the rocky wall passing by very close to me. As we descend, the air grows warmer and turns quite stale.

We stop at a tunnel, and most of the miners get out here. When the gate closes again only four or five of us are left. We continue to descend until we stop at another tunnel, where the rest of the miners get off the elevator. I continue going down alone.

Finally with a crash the elevator comes to a stop. I pull open the gate and step off, entering a dimly lit tunnel. I can hear the noise of the elevator as it goes back up.

Ahead I see a mining car that runs on tracks. I climb in, start the motor, and begin moving slowly through the tunnel.

I stop the car at the end of the tracks. Climbing out, I switch on the light on my helmet and begin to unload the tools.

As I listen to the distant echoes of hydraulic drills and jackhammers, suddenly I hear a faint, stifled human cry—I realize that someone is trapped! Quickly I seize a pick and sling a coil of rope over my shoulder. Abandoning the rest of the tools, I advance resolutely through the tunnel. As the tunnel narrows, I leave the electric lights far behind, and now have only the light on my helmet to guide me. From time to time I stop to listen for the direction of the cry.

Nearing the end of the tunnel, I must walk hunched over. Just ahead, in a recent excavation, the tunnel comes to an end—some loose debris tells me there has been a cave-in. Water trickles down around the rocks and broken wooden beams. The floor is a quagmire, and my boots sink into the sticky mud.

Using my pick, I begin to clear away the rocks. Soon I uncover a narrow hole going into the wall. While I'm trying to figure out how I can possibly squeeze into it, I distinctly hear the cries—the trapped miner must be very near.

Wedging the handle of the pick between two large rocks, I tie one end of the rope to it. Passing the other end around my waist, I fasten it securely with a buckle.

With great difficulty I manage to wriggle headfirst into the tight opening. Dragging myself forward on my elbows, I crawl slowly down the steep incline. By the light on my helmet I can see that the passage narrows until it closes off. The heat and humidity are so stifling that I can hardly breathe. (*)

Thick mud flows down around my feet, slowly covering my legs and oozing stickily under my chest. I realize that this narrow hole will soon be completely filled with mud.

I press upward, but my back hits solid rock. I try backing up—it's now impossible. Again I hear the plaintive voice very close by. (*)

Suddenly I yell at the top of my lungs as the floor gives way beneath me, dragging me down in its collapse.

I plunge downward until a sharp jerk on the rope at my waist abruptly breaks my fall; I'm left dangling absurdly at the end of the rope like some muddy pendulum.

My fall has been stopped just above a carpeted floor, and I see before me an elegant room flooded with light. I glimpse some sort of laboratory filled with enormous bookshelves, but my predicament is so pressing that I'm completely absorbed in trying to free myself.

With my left hand I grasp the taut rope above; with my right hand I release the buckle fastening the rope around my waist, and tumble softly onto the carpet.

"What manners, my friend, what manners!" says a high-pitched voice behind me. I spin around and stop short.

Standing before me is a little man, scarcely taller than my knee. Except for his slightly pointed ears, he could be described as very well-proportioned. He is dressed in bright colors, yet in the unmistakable style of a miner.

I feel at once ridiculous and dismayed when he offers me a glass of punch. It's quite refreshing, however, so I drink it straight down.

Now the little man cups his hands before his mouth and makes the plaintive cry I recognize so well. On hearing it I'm outraged, and demand to know just what he means by tricking me this way. To my bewilderment, he replies that thanks to this experience, in the future my digestion will be much improved.

This extraordinary little character goes on to explain to me how the rope squeezing my waist and stomach during my fall has done me a world of good, as did the journey I made through the tunnel crawling on my elbows. He concludes his strange remarks by asking me whether the expression, "You are in the bowels of the earth," means anything to me.

I answer that this is just a figure of speech, but the little man assures me that in this case it holds a great truth. Then he adds, "You are in your own bowels. When something goes wrong in their viscera, people can think all kinds of crazy thoughts. In turn, these negative thoughts can harm their internal organs. So from now on you must take good care of yourself in this regard. If you don't, I'll begin walking around, and you'll feel sharp pangs and all kinds of internal discomfort. And I have colleagues who are in charge of other parts of your body like your lungs, your heart, and so on."

Having said this, the little man begins walking around on the walls and ceiling. As he does so, I feel twinges of discomfort near my stomach, liver, and kidneys. (*)

Afterwards the little man sprays me from head to toe with a stream of water from a golden hose, thoroughly cleansing me of all the mud, and in an instant I'm dry. I stretch out on a spacious sofa and begin to relax. Rhythmically the little man passes a soft brush over my waist and abdomen, producing a remarkable sensation of relaxation in these areas. I realize that when discomfort is relieved in my stomach, liver, and kidneys, my ideas and feelings change for the better. (*)

I feel a strong vibration, and find myself back in the elevator, rising toward the surface of the earth.

Notes to Guided Experiences

The structure of each guided experience contains the following basic elements: (1) entrance and setting; (2) increasing tension; (3) representation of “knots” (problematic psychological nuclei); (4) resolution (possibilities for resolving the knots); (5) reduction of tension; and (6) a smooth and gradual exit in which the reader generally retraces the previous steps. The final step enables the reader to obtain a kind of synthesis of the whole experience.

The symbol (*) inserted throughout the text indicates pauses intended to allow time for readers or listeners to introduce their personal images.

Notes to Part One

I. The Child

The painting through which the reader enters the amusement park is inspired by the first card of the Tarocchi. This card bears the image of the Magician, who has always been associated with the inversion of reality, sleight of hand, and trickery. He is related to the trickster and the prestidigitator, and opens a vein of irrationality that allows the reader to enter that dimension of wonder so helpful in awakening childhood memories.

II. An Enemy

The paralysis that dominates much of this tale enables the reader to recreate situations in which certain emotions lose their previous intensity as a result of slowing down the movement of the corresponding image. In this way, a climate of reconciliation can be generated, and we note that the “forgiver” ends up better off than the “offender,” who previously had the initiative.

III. My Greatest Mistake

The scene with firemen as agents of justice and executioners is inspired by Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451.* In the present narrative, this image is used as a contrast to the sentence of dying of thirst in the desert. A similar contrast highlights the absurdity of the trial, when the accused, instead of speaking in self-defense to “discharge” the supposed guilt, takes a drink, “charging” his or her mouth with a swallow of water.

The court clerk’s final remark, “What I have spoken, I have spoken!” echoes the words of Pilate, recalling that other surrealistic trial.

The Elders who personify the hours are inspired by D. H. Lawrence’s *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation.*

Glasses that invert what one sees are well-known in experimental psychology and have been cited by, among others, Merleau-Ponty in *The Structure of Behavior.*

V. My Ideal

The image of the giant is inspired by Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* The children's song recalls the festivals of the Basque people and the songs that accompany their parades of floats and giant effigies with oversized heads.

The holographic image is reminiscent of the panoramic projections in Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End.*

The theme of the search for one's "ideal" and the injunction, "Do not look behind you," allude to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades.

VI. Resentment

The plot is set in a classical context, although the initial scenes of the city recall Venice or perhaps Amsterdam.

The recital by the first chorus is an adaptation of the Orphic Hymn to Thanatos, or Death, which reads as follows:

> Hear me you who steer the course of all mortals
> and give holy time to all ahead of whom you lie.
> Your sleep tears the soul free from the body's hold
> when you undo nature's tenacious bonds,
> bringing long and eternal slumber to the living.
> Common to all, you are unjust to some
> when you bring a swift end to youthful life at its peak.
> In you alone is the verdict common to all executed,
> for to prayers and entreaties you alone are deaf.
> But, O blessed one, with sacrifices and pious vows
> I beg you to grant long life,
> that old age might be a noble prize among men.

The recital by the second chorus is based on the Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne, which reads:

> I call upon queen Mnemosyne, Zeus' consort,
> who gave birth to the holy, sacred and clear-voiced Muses.
> Evil oblivion that harms the mind is alien to her
> who gives coherence to the mind and soul of mortals.
> She increases men's ability and power to think,
> and, sweet and vigilant, she reminds us of all
> the thoughts that we always store in our breasts,
> never straying, and ever rousing the mind to action.
> But, O blessed goddess, for the initiates stir the memory
> of the sacred rite, and ward off oblivion from them.

Concluding its dialogue, the specter in this guided experience says, "I must be gone, for the firefly's fading glow shows that dawn is near. Farewell, farewell. Remember me!" This is inspired by Act I, Scene v of *Hamlet,* in which the ghost of Hamlet's father reveals to the Prince the identity of the person who murdered him by means of poison.

The boat in this narrative, which is also a hearse, recalls the root of the word carnival, *carrus navalis* (the author notes that this etymology is more accurate than the one generally reported). To this day the black carriages or vehicles used as hearses are often covered with flowers and adorned with large oysters or shells, bringing to mind the final voyage across the water in Greek mythology. The floral displays and the waters of the Roman festival of Lupercalia share the same origin. In this tale we find disguises and transformations through which, by the conclusion of the story, the somber Charon has become the young driver of the speedboat returning from the island of the dead.

This narrative embodies a strikingly rich and complex play of images in which each element deserves individual study: The immobile sea, the boat suspended above the water, the burning cloak, the choruses of women and the cypresses (which evoke an atmosphere of Greek islands and cemeteries), and so on.

VII. The Protector of Life

The figure of the Protector of Life is inspired by the twenty-first card of the Tarot. The image in the *Tarocchi* is closer to the figure of this guided experience than are those of the first compilation of Court de Gebelin, the Tarot of the Bohemians, or the pseudo Egyptian Tarot. Regarding *Anima Mundis,* known as “The World” in the Tarot, there is an illuminating engraving in the work by Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris Scilicet et Minoris, Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia,* first published in 1617. Jung also refers to this archetype in his *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido.*

Nor have these virgins of the grottos been overlooked by the religions. In this sense the Protector of Life is a virgin of the grottos, with elements from Greek paganism, such as her crown of flowers and the fawn that licks her hand, bringing to mind Artemis or her Roman counterpart Diana. One need only exchange her crown of flowers for one of stars, or place her feet atop a half moon to be in the presence of a virgin of the grottos, but now as part of the heritage of the new religions that displaced paganism.

The plot is set in a tropical locale instead of the classical setting one might expect for a virgin of the grottos, accentuating the rather singular circumstances of the story. The qualities of the water that the protagonist drinks recall the life-giving waters of the fountain of youth. All of these elements move toward the same end—encouraging a reconciliation with one’s own body.

VIII. The Rescue

The eeriness of the plot is achieved through the ambiguity of time (“In the strange half-light I’m unsure whether it is dawn or dusk”); the contrast of place (“I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I’m coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life”); the inability to communicate with other people and the Babel-like confusion of tongues (“I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, ‘Rex voluntas!’”); and finally by leaving the protagonist at the mercy of uncontrollable forces—heat, earthquakes, strange astronomical phenomena, polluted water, a climate of war, an armed giant robot, and so on.

Owing to these devices, a person emerging from this chaotic space-time is able to reflect with some care upon less catastrophic aspects of his or her own life, and thus formulate solid proposals for the future.

The four threatening clouds have as a copresent reference the apocalypse of the Revelation of St. John the Divine:

> 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.
> 3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.
> 4 And there went out another horse *that was* red: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.
> 5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.
> 6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.
> 7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.
> 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.

IX. False Hopes

This guided experience opens with elements from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Inscribed on the lintel over the famous portal, Dante and Virgil read:

> Through me you enter the woeful city,
> Through me you enter eternal grief,
> Through me you enter among the lost
> Justice moved my high maker:
> The Divine Power made me,
> The Supreme Wisdom, and the Primal Love.
> Before me nothing was created
> If not eternal, and eternal I endure.
> Abandon every hope, you who enter.

XI. The Journey

The rapid motion of the bubble recalls the journey so splendidly recounted by Olaf Stapledon in *Star Maker.*

We also find a reference to the Doppler effect, in which the color of the stars changes with increasing velocity: "I can feel our velocity steadily increasing, and the clear white light of the stars changes color until all the stars have disappeared in total darkness."

Here we encounter a curious consideration: "As though propelled by a giant slingshot, we shoot straight upward into the sky. I think we're heading toward the star Beta Hydris, or perhaps

the galaxy NGC 3621." We clearly understand in this context that the bubble ascends straight upward. Why, then, are these cosmic directions noted?

Since the sun is setting at the moment being described ("Toward the abyss it is already night. Toward the plain the last rays of the sun escape in delicate hues"), this is sufficient to tell us the local time at which the event takes place. The book was written in mid-1980, that is around June 30, at longitude 69° west and latitude 33° south, and for this date and location the local time at sunset was 7:00 p.m. (four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time). At sunset, at elevation 90°—the point directly over the bubble, toward which it is heading—we would see a sky between the southern constellations Crux and Corvus and near Antlia in which several celestial bodies could easily be discerned. Among these, the most outstanding would be the star Beta Hydris and the galaxy NGC 3621.

However the author does not specify which of these celestial bodies the bubble is heading toward, even though Beta Hydris is at azimuth 125º 28' west, elevation 87º 35', right ascension 11h 52m 0s, and declination -34º 23', while NGC 3621 is at 92º 08' west, elevation 80º 43', 11h 17m 3s, and -32º 52'. To be precise, the direction of the bubble would actually be closer to Beta Hydris (number 103.192 in the Draper catalog, magnitude 4.3, spectral class B9, variable, 326 light years distant), whereas NGC 3621 (a spiral galaxy some 16 million light years away) would be rather more to one side.

Perhaps the author's hesitation in deciding on Beta Hydris lay in the fact that the galaxy NGC 3621 is the more beautiful celestial body, so why not choose it as a destination instead? Among all the oddities that appear in these guided experiences, such astronomical license should not be ill-received.

Regarding the body in motion, the guided experience reads as follows:

> I walk onward until I come to a flat area. In the center I see a large object, alive with movement, and impossible to capture with my eye as it flows endlessly into itself; regardless of which direction I look on its surface, my gaze always ends up immersed, drawn deep into the object's interior. Feeling dizzy, I look away.

Clearly this description alludes to those topological constructions of modern geometry that are represented or modeled as "enveloping" objects that flow into themselves. By putting this kind of object into motion, the author creates a disconcerting effect. Remembering Escher's woodcut engraving of a Möbius strip helps approach the central idea: Escher's work, though static, gives us the sensation of paradoxical surface and perception. Hofstader, in *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid,* explains:

> Implicit in the concept of Strange Loops is the concept of infinity, since what else is a loop but a way of representing an endless process in a finite way? And infinity plays a large role in many of Escher's drawings. Copies of one single theme often fit into each other, forming visual analogues to the canons of Bach.

According to this, the object that appears in this guided experience is an endless loop "flowing into itself."

XII. The Festival

In *Heaven and Hell,* Huxley remarked:

> For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured.

What follows is the point of view of a psychologist who delved deeply into this guided experience, meditating on it while another person read it aloud: “I saw that a state of ‘heightened perception’ could be induced without resorting to drugs or other more or less dissociative procedures such as sleep deprivation, fasting or low-calorie diets, hyperventilation, sensory deprivation in isolation tanks through immersion in darkness and immobility, experimentally or religiously induced trances, and so on. To me this represents a major advance, both because of how innocuous it is and because of the possibilities it offers the researcher investigating special states of consciousness.

“Furthermore, why couldn’t we make use of the guided experiences as therapeutic tools in professional practice? Although it has been explained to me that they were not conceived with this intention, I would hope that this possibility is not overlooked. Moreover, in the field of social psychology, perhaps important numbers of people who now resort to drugs or alcohol as a solution or escape from their suffering could find new orientation through making use of the guided experiences.

“These are my professional concerns. As for me personally, perhaps because this guided experience had such a strong impact on me, this material has opened a new area of study about myself that wouldn’t have occurred to me only a few hours ago.”

Notes to Part Two

VI. The Costumes

Numerous elements in this guided experience bring to mind Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass.* We recall the expansions and contractions of this passage:

> “Well, I’ll eat it,” said Alice, “and if it makes me grow larger, I can reach the key; and if it makes me grow smaller, I can creep under the door; so either way I’ll get into the garden, and I don’t care which happens!”
>
> She ate a little bit, and said anxiously to herself, “Which way? Which way?”, holding her hand on the top of her head to feel which way it was growing.…

And we note the transformations of space in this passage:

> “Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it’s turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It’ll be easy enough to get through.”

Similarly, in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings,* for example, we encounter images transformed through reflection in a watery form of the magical mirror that occurs so frequently in universal

mythology. As for humans transforming into animals, an unbroken line connects the most ancient traditions with Kafka's *Metamorphosis.* These themes, then, are widely known, yet this guided experience still proves to be highly original. It would seem, as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus,* that the best writings serve in reality to awaken the memory of that which we already know.

VII. The Clouds

This story bears the name of Aristophanes' comedy, first performed in 423 B.C.E. Throughout the guided experience, there is a lighthearted, playful background in homage to the spirit of the original Greek work.

The voice heard at the beginning of this story incorporates into a single passage elements inspired by the genesis passages of three important works. The opening echoes the "Hymn of Creation" of the *Rig Veda,* which reads, "Neither nonbeing nor being was as yet, neither was airy space nor heavens beyond." The next phrase, "and darkness was upon the face of the deep," is a direct quotation from the first book of Moses (Genesis 1:2). The following sentence is inspired by the Chichicastenango manuscript of the *Popol Vuh,* the sacred Council Book of the Quiché Mayan people, which reads, "There is not yet one person, one animal, bird, fish, crab, tree, rock, hollow, canyon, meadow, forest." With the next phrase, "There were neither galaxies nor atoms," we enter the realm of present-day science journalism with its debates on the Big Bang theory. And finally, "nor were there department stores," derives, according to a note by the author, from an explanation given by a four-year-old girl. Here is the anecdote in question:

"So tell me, Nancy, what was everything like before the world began?"

"There was no mommy and daddy," replied the little one, "and no department stores, either."

IX. The Miner

The little man of the mine is a gnome, a character from the depths who appears widely throughout European tales and legends. In this guided experience, the little character is an allegory that corresponds to the transformation of physical intrabody sensations (visceral coenesthesia) into visual images in the reader's mind.

Contributions to Thought

Psychology of the Image

Introduction to Psychology of the Image

When we refer to the “space of representation” some readers may think of a kind of “container” in whose interior are certain “contents” of consciousness. If they further believe that those “contents” are images, and that those images operate as mere copies of perception, we will have a few difficulties to sort out before we are able to come to agreement. Indeed, those who think in this way position themselves within the perspective of a naive psychology—a branch of the natural sciences—that begins without examination from a vision oriented toward the study of psychological phenomena in terms of materiality.

It is useful to clarify from the outset that our position regarding the theme of consciousness and its functions does not share this assumption. For us, the consciousness is intentionality. Clearly, intentionality does not exist in natural phenomena and is totally alien to the studies of the sciences occupied with the materiality of phenomena.

It is our aim in this work to give an account of the image as an active way for the consciousness to be in the world—a way of being that cannot be independent of spatiality, and in which the numerous functions fulfilled by the image depend upon the position that it assumes in this spatiality.

Chapter 1: The Problem of Space in the Study of Phenomena of Consciousness

1.1 Background

Through the years there has been no lack of psychologists who, having located the sensation-producing phenomena in an “external” space, have spoken of representations as if they were simply copies of what was perceived. It seems especially odd, then, that when dealing with the facts of representation, they have not concerned themselves with clarifying “where” these phenomena take place. They have described the facts of consciousness, linking them to the passage of time (without explaining that passage), and they have interpreted the sources of these events as determinant causes (located in an external space). No doubt they thought that in this way they had exhausted the primary questions (and answers) that had to be dealt with in order to give a foundation to their science. They believed that the time in which both internal and external phenomena take place is an absolute time. Similarly, they maintained that since space is often distorted in images, dreams, and hallucinations, it can only hold for “external” reality and not for the consciousness.

Various psychologists have concerned themselves with trying to understand whether representation is proper to the soul, the brain, or some other entity. In this context we cannot forget Descartes’s celebrated letter to Christina of Sweden in which, as a way of explaining how thought and will are able to set the human machine into motion, he mentions a “point of union” between the soul and the body.

It is strange to think that it is precisely this philosopher who, while bringing us so much closer to a comprehension of the immediate and indubitable data of thought, nonetheless failed to take note of the theme of the spatiality of representation as a datum independent of the spatiality that the senses obtain from their external sources. Certainly, as the founder of geometrical optics and the creator of analytic geometry, he was very familiar with the problems related to locating phenomena precisely in space. He had all the necessary elements (both his methodological doubt and his concern with the placement of phenomena in space), but failed to take that additional small step that would have allowed him to grasp the idea of the location of representation in various “points” of the space of consciousness.

Almost three hundred years passed before the concept of representation became independent of naive spatial representation and acquired its own meaning. This was thanks to the reevaluation or, more correctly, the re-creation of the idea of intentionality, an idea that had previously been noted by the scholastic philosophers in their studies of Aristotle. The credit for this re-creation belongs principally to Franz Brentano, and numerous references to the problem of intentionality can be found in his work. Though Brentano did not fully develop these notions, his efforts nonetheless laid the foundation for subsequent advances.

It was the work of one of Brentano’s disciples, however, that finally allowed an adequate statement of the problem and so permitted an advance toward solutions that, in my view, will end up revolutionizing not only the discipline of psychology (apparently the appropriate field for the development of these themes) but many others as well.

In *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy,* Husserl studied the "regional idea of the thing in *general"* as that self-identical something that is maintained in the midst of the innumerable changes of this or that determined form, and that makes itself known in the corresponding infinite series of noemata, also of a determined form.

The thing is given in its ideal essence of *res temporalis* in the necessary "form" of time. It is given in its ideal essence of *res materialis* in its substantial unity, and in its ideal essence of *res extensa* in the "form" of space. This is so notwithstanding the infinitely varied changes of form or, given a fixed form, the changes of place, which can also be infinitely varied or "mobile." Thus, Husserl says, we apprehend the idea of space and the ideas included in it. In this way, the problem of the origin of the representation in space is reduced through phenomenological analysis to the different expressions in which space exhibits itself as an intuitive unity.[1]

Husserl places us in the field of eidetic reduction, and though innumerable insights may be drawn from his works, our interest here is oriented toward themes that are proper to a phenomenological psychology rather than to phenomenological philosophy. Thus, even though we will repeatedly abandon the *epoché* of the Husserlian method, these transgressions will find their justification in the need to create a more accessible explanation of our point of view. On the other hand, if post-Husserlian psychology has failed to consider the problem that we will refer to as "space of representation," this indicates nothing more than the need for some of its theses to be reconsidered. In any event, it would be excessive to accuse us of a naive relapse into the world of the "*natural* mind."[2]

Moreover, we are not concerned with "the problem of the origin of the representation of space" but, on the contrary, with the problem of the origin of the "space" that accompanies any representation and in which all representation is given. Since the "space" of representation is not independent of representations, how could we understand such a space other than as the consciousness of the spatiality of any representation? And even if the direction of our study involves observing representation introspectively (and hence, naively) and also introspectively observing the spatiality of the act of observing, still, nothing prevents us from attending to the acts of consciousness that refer to spatiality. This could later be developed into a phenomenological reduction or, without denying the importance of that reduction, it could be postponed, in which case the most that could be said is that this description is incomplete.

Finally, as regards antecedents in the attempt to describe the spatiality of the phenomena of representation, we should note that Binswanger has also made a contribution, though without having reached an understanding of the profound significance of "where" the representations are given.[3]

1.2 Distinctions Among Sensation, Perception, and Image

Defining sensations in terms of afferent nervous processes that begin in a receptor and travel to the central nervous system, or the like, is something proper to physiology rather than psychology, and such descriptions are not useful for our purposes.

There have also been attempts to define sensation as any experience, out of the total number of perceptual experiences that could exist within a determined modality, as given by the formula (UT-LT)/DT where UT denotes the upper threshold, LT the lower threshold, and DT the differential threshold. This way of presenting things does not allow us to grasp the function of the element that is being studied, and in general the same objection holds for all approaches that share an atomistic background. On the contrary, this approach appeals to a structure (e.g.,

perception) in order to isolate the “constitutive” elements of this ambit, and from there it then attempts to explain, in a circular way, that same structure.

We can provisionally understand sensation as the register obtained upon detecting a stimulus from the external or internal environment that produces a variation in the tone of operation of the affected sense. But the study of sensation must go further, since we observe that there are sensations that accompany the acts of thinking, remembering, apperception, and so on. In every case there is a variation in the tone of operation of a sense or, as with coenesthesia, a combination of senses, but of course thinking is not “felt” in the same way or mode as an external object. Therefore, the sensation appears as a structuring carried out by the consciousness in its activity of synthesis, but analyzed in a particular way in order to describe its original source, that is, in order to describe the sense from which the impulse originated.

As for perception, there have been various definitions, such as: “Perception is the act of becoming aware of external objects, their qualities or relationships, and unlike memory and other mental processes, perception follows directly from sensory processes.” However, we understand perception as a structuring of sensation that is performed by the consciousness in reference to a sense or combination of senses.

The image has been described as “an element of experience arising from a central point, and possessing all the attributes of sensation.” We prefer to understand the image as a structured and formalized representation of the sensations or perceptions that originate, or have originated, from the external or internal environment. The image, then, is not a “copy” but a synthesis; an intention, not the mere passivity of the consciousness.[4]

1.3 The Idea of “Consciousness-Being-in-the-World” as a Descriptive Touchstone in Facing the Interpretations of Naive Psychology

We must revive the idea that all sensations, perceptions, and images are forms of consciousness, and that it would therefore be more correct to speak of “consciousness of sensation,” “consciousness of perceptions,” and “consciousness of the image.” Here we are not taking an apperceptive stance in which there are both psychological phenomena and an awareness of them. Rather, we are saying that it is consciousness itself that modifies its own way of being, or better, that consciousness is nothing but a way of being—being emotional, for example, or being expectant, and so on.

When imagining an object, the consciousness does not stand apart, uncommitted and neutral toward this operation; the consciousness in this situation is a commitment referred to the imagined. Even in the aforementioned case of apperception, we would still have to speak of consciousness in an apperceptive attitude.

It follows that there is no consciousness but consciousness of something, and that this something is referred to a type of world—naive, natural, or phenomenological; “external” or “internal.” Our understanding is not helped, then, by studying the state of fear of danger, for example, in a kind of descriptive schizophrenia in which we take as given that we are investigating a type of emotion that does not implicate other functions of the consciousness. In reality, things are not like this at all.

When we are afraid of a danger, for example, the whole consciousness is in a state of danger. And even though we might recognize other functions (such as perception, reasoning, or memory), it is as if they were now operating saturated by the situation of danger, with everything

referred to the danger. In this way, consciousness is a global way of being-in-the-world and a global behavior in front of the world. And if psychological phenomena are spoken of in terms of synthesis, we must know to which synthesis we are referring and what is our starting point in order to understand what separates our concepts from others that also speak of "synthesis," "globality," "structure," and so on.[5]

At the same time, having established the character of our synthesis, nothing prevents us from going deeper into whatever form of analysis will allow us to better clarify and illustrate our exposition. But these analyses will always be understood in a larger context, and the object or the act under consideration cannot be made independent of that context, nor can it be isolated from its *reference to something.* The same holds for the psychic "functions," which are working conjointly according to the way of being of the consciousness at the moment we are considering it.

Is the point, then, that there are sensations, perceptions, and images acting even during full vigil, when, for example, we are dealing with a mathematical problem that occupies our entire interest? Is this so even during the exercise of mathematical abstractions in which we must avoid every type of "distraction"? Indeed, we are saying that such abstractions would not be possible if these mathematicians did not have sensory registers of their mental activity, or if they did not perceive the temporal succession of their thought processes, or if they did not imagine thanks to mathematical signs or symbols (symbols defined by convention and later memorized). Finally, if our mathematizing subjects wish to work with meanings, they must recognize that these are not independent of the expressions that are formally presented to them through their sight or their representation.

But we go even further than that in maintaining that other functions are working simultaneously, or in saying that the state of vigil, in which these operations are being carried out, *is not isolated* from other levels of activity of the consciousness, is not isolated from other types of operations that are more fully expressed in semi-sleep or sleep. And it is this simultaneity of work of distinct levels that allows us to speak of "intuitions," "inspirations," or "unexpected solutions" that at times suddenly burst into logical discourse, adding their own schemas, in this case within the context of doing mathematics. Scientific literature is filled with examples of problems whose solutions have appeared in activities far removed from those of logical discourse, illustrating precisely the involvement of the *whole* consciousness in the search for solutions to such problems.

We do not support this position on the basis of neurophysiological schemes that uphold these claims on the basis of the activity registered by an electroencephalograph. Nor do we support it by appealing to the action of some supposed "subconscious," "unconscious" or any other epochal myth based on dubiously formulated scientific premises. We base our approach on a psychology of the consciousness that acknowledges diverse levels of work and operations of varying importance in each psychic phenomenon, all of which are always integrated in the action of a global consciousness.

1.4 The Internal Register Through Which the Image Is Given in Some "Place"

Pressing the keys on the keyboard I have in front of me causes the appearance of graphic characters that I can see on the monitor connected to it. The movements of my fingers are associated with particular letters, and automatically, following my thoughts, the phrases and

sentences flow out. Now, suppose that I close my eyes and stop thinking about the previous discussion in order to concentrate on the image of the keyboard. In some way I have the keyboard “right in front of me,” represented by a visual image that is almost as if copied from the perception I was experiencing before I closed my eyes.

Opening my eyes, I get up from my chair and take a few steps across the room. Again I close my eyes, and upon remembering the keyboard, I imagine it somewhere behind me. If I wanted to observe the image exactly as the keyboard presented itself to my perception, I would have to place it in a position “in front of my eyes.” To do that, I must either mentally turn my body around or “move” the machine through the “external space” until it is located in front of me. Now the machine is “in front of my eyes,” but this produces a spatial dislocation, because if I open my eyes I will see a window in front of me. In this way, it becomes evident that the location of the object in the representation is placed in a “space” that may not coincide with the space in which the original perception was given.

Furthermore, I can go on to imagine the keyboard located in the window in front of me, or I can imagine the whole ensemble closer to or farther away from me. I can even expand or shrink the size of the whole scene or some of its components. I can distort these bodies, and finally, I can even change their colors.

But I also discover some impossibilities. I cannot, for example, imagine those objects without color, no matter how hard I try to make them “transparent,” since it is precisely color or “shade” that will define the edges or differences of the transparency. Clearly, I am confirming that extension and color are not independent contents, and hence I cannot imagine color without extension. It is precisely this point that makes me reflect that *if I am unable to represent color without extension, then the extension of the representation also denotes the “spatiality” in which the represented object is placed*. It is this spatiality that interests us.

Chapter 2: Location of What Is Represented in the Spatiality of Representation

2.1 Different Types of Perception and Representation

Psychologists through the ages have made extensive lists dealing with perceptions and sensations, and today, with the discovery of new neuroreceptors, they have begun to talk about thermoceptors and baroceptors, as well as internal detectors of acidity, alkalinity, and so forth.

To the sensations corresponding to the external senses we will add those that correspond to diffuse senses such as the kinesthetic (movement and corporal posture) and coenesthetic (register of temperature, pain, and so on—that is, the register of the intrabody in general) which, even when explained in terms of an internal tactile sense, cannot be reduced to that.

For our purposes what has been noted above should suffice, without claiming that this in any way exhausts the possible registers that correspond to the external and internal senses or the multiple perceptual combinations possible between them.

It is important, then, to establish a parallel between representations and perceptions that are generically classified as “internal” or “external.” It is unfortunate that the term “representation” has so frequently been limited to visual images.[6] Moreover, spatiality seems almost always to be referred to the visual, even though auditory perceptions and representations also reveal the sources of stimuli localized in some “place.” This is also the case with touch, taste, smell, and, of course, with those senses referred to the position of the body and the phenomena of the intrabody.[7]

2.2 The Interaction of Images Referred to Different Perceptual Sources

In the earlier example of automatism we were dealing with the connection between the flow of words and the movement of the fingers, which when striking the keys triggered graphic characters on the monitor. This clearly illustrates a case where precise spatial positions are associated with kinesthetic registers. If spatiality did not exist for these registers, such an association would be impossible. But it is also interesting to verify how thought in the form of words is translated into the movement of the fingers, linked to particular positions of the keys. Moreover, such “translation” is quite common, and frequently occurs with representations based on perceptions originating in different senses.

For example, all we need to do is close our eyes and listen to different sounds in order to observe that our eyes tend to move in the direction of the auditory perception. Moreover, if we imagine a piece of music, we can observe how our mechanisms of vocalization tend to adapt, especially to high- and low-pitched sounds. This phenomenon of “subvocalization” is independent of whether the piece of music has been imagined as sung or hummed, or whether the representation involves an entire symphony orchestra. The reference to the representation of high-pitched sounds as “high” and low-pitched sounds as “low” is the telltale sign that confirms the existence—in association with the sounds—of spatiality and positioning in the system of vocalization.

There are also other interactions between images that correspond to different senses. In relation to this question, it could be that ordinary language offers greater insight than scholarly treatises. Consider such cases as “sweet” love and the “bitter” taste of defeat, “hard” words, “gloomy” thoughts, “great” men, the “fire” of desire, and “sharp” minds.

In light of all this, it should not seem strange that many of the allegorizations that occur in dreams, folklore, myths, religions, and even daily reverie are based on translations from one sense to another, and hence from one system of images to another. So for example, a raging fire may appear in a dream from which the subject awakens with a bad case of heartburn; or the subject, having dreamed of being mired in quicksand, may wake to find his legs entangled in the sheets. What seems most appropriate, then, in dealing with these phenomena is to base our interpretations on an exhaustive investigation of the immediately given rather than adding new myths that claim to interpret these dramatizations.

2.3 Representation: Capacity for Transformation

In our example we saw how the representation of the keyboard could be altered in its color, shape, size, position, perspective, and so on. It is also clear that we could completely “recreate” the object in question, modifying it until it became unrecognizable. If, finally, our keyboard becomes a rock (as the prince becomes a frog), even if all the characteristics in our new image are those of a rock, for us that rock will remain “the transformed keyboard.” Such recognition is possible thanks to the memories and the history that we keep alive in our new representation. This new image will involve a structuring that is no longer simply visual. And it is precisely this structuring in which the image is given that allows us to establish memories, climates, and affective tones related to the object in question, even when it has disappeared or been drastically modified. Conversely, we can observe that the modification of the general structure will produce variations in the image (when recalled or superimposed on the perception).[8]

We find ourselves, then, in a world in which the perception seems to inform us of its variations, while the image, in stimulating our memory, launches us to reinterpret and modify the data coming from that world. Accordingly, to every perception there is a corresponding representation that unfailingly modifies the “data” of “reality.” In other words, *the structure perception-image is a behavior of the consciousness in the world, whose meaning is the transformation of this world*.[9]

2.4 Recognition and Non-recognition of the Perceived

Looking at the keyboard, I am able to recognize it thanks to the representations that accompany my perceptions of that object. If, when I again see the keyboard, it has changed for any reason, I will experience a lack of correspondence with those representations. As a result, I might experience any of a gamut of mental phenomena. These could range from disagreeable surprise to a total lack of recognition in which the object would appear as “another” object, and not the one I expected to find. This lack of coincidence reveals the discrepancies between the new perceptions and the old images. In that moment, I compare the differences between the keyboard I remember and the one now present to me.

Non-recognition of a new object that presents itself is in fact the re-cognition of the absence of an image corresponding to this new object. So it is that quite often I try to accommodate the new perception through “as if” interpretations in relation to something familiar.[10]

We have seen that the image has the ability to free the object from the context in which it was perceived. The image has sufficient plasticity to modify itself and dislocate its references. In fact, the reaccommodation of the image to the new perception does not present great difficulties (difficulties that become evident in the phenomena that accompany the image, as is the case with the emotional phenomena and the corporal tone that accompany the representation). *Therefore, the image can move—transforming itself—through the different times and spaces of consciousness.* In this present moment of consciousness I can retain the past image of this object, which has been modified, or extend it toward other possible modifications of "what it might become" or toward other possible ways of being.

2.5 Image of the Perception and Perception of the Image

To every perception corresponds an image, and this fact is given as a structure. We can also note that neither affect nor corporal tone can be separated from the globality of the consciousness. Earlier we mentioned a case in which we tried to follow perceptions and translated images, as in adaptations of the vocal apparatus or the movement of the eyeballs when seeking, for example, the source of a sound. Following this kind of description is easier if we locate ourselves in a single band of perception-representation-motricity.

So it is, then, that if I face the keyboard and close my eyes, I can still, with relative accuracy, extend my fingers and hit the correct keys. This is because my fingers follow images that operate in this case, "delineating" my movements. If, however, I displace the image toward the left in my space of representation, my fingers will follow the delineation and will no longer coincide with the external keyboard. If I then "internalize" the image toward the center of the space of representation, placing the image of the keyboard "inside my head," for example, the movement of my fingers will tend to be inhibited. Conversely, if I "externalize" the image, placing it "several paces in front of me," I will experience that not only my fingers but also entire areas of my body will tend in that direction.

If the perceptions of the "external" world correspond to "externalized" images ("outside" the coenesthetic-tactile register of the head, "inside" of whose boundary is the "look" of the observer), the perception of the "internal" world will have corresponding "internalized" representations ("inside" the limits of the tactile-coenesthetic register, which in turn is "looked on" also from "within" this boundary but displaced from its central position, which is now occupied by that which is "seen"). This shows a certain "externality" of the look that observes or experiences any given scene. Taking this to the extreme, I can observe the "look" itself, in which case the act of observation becomes external with respect to the "look" as an object, which now occupies the central position. This "perspective" shows that besides the "spatiality" of that which is represented as a non-independent content (following Husserl), there is a "spatiality" in the structure object-look. It could be said that in reality this is not a "perspective" in the internal spatial sense but rather involves acts of consciousness that when retained appear continuous, producing the illusion of perspective. But even as temporal retentions they cannot escape, as far as representation, from becoming non-independent contents, and consequently subject to spatiality, whether they are simply represented objects or the structure object-look.

Some psychologists have noted this "look" that is referred to the representation but have mistaken it for the "I" or the "attentional focus." No doubt such confusion is due to a lack of understanding of the distinction between acts and objects of consciousness, and also of course to prejudices with respect to the activity of representation.[11]

Therefore, when I am faced with imminent danger, such as a tiger leaping toward the bars of the cage in front of me, my representations will correspond to the object, which, moreover, I recognize as dangerous.

The images that correspond to the recognition of external “danger” are structured with previous perceptions (and therefore, representations) of the intrabody. These gain special intensity in the case of “consciousness of danger,” modifying the perspective from which the object is observed and producing the register of a “shortening of space” between the danger and myself. In this way, the action of the images in various locations in the space of representation clearly modifies conduct in the world (as we have seen with respect to the “delineating” images).

In other words: Danger magnifies the perceptions and the corresponding images of one’s own body, but that structure is directly referred to the perception-image of that which is dangerous (external to the body), through which the contamination, the “invasion” of the body by the dangerous is assured. My whole consciousness is, in this case, consciousness-in-danger, dominated by the dangerous—without limits, without distance, without external “space,” since I feel the danger within me, for-me, in the “interior” of the space of representation, within the boundary of the tactile-coenesthetic register of my head and skin. My most immediate, “natural” response is to flee from the danger, to flee from my endangered self (moving delineating images in my space of representation in the direction opposite to the danger and toward the “outside” of my body). If, through a powerful effort of self-reflection, I decided to remain face to face with the danger, I would have to do this “fighting with myself.” I would have to reject the danger from within and with a new perspective take mental distance from the compulsion to flee from the danger. I would have to modify the placement of the images in the depths of the space of representation, and hence the perception I have of them.

Chapter 3: Configuration of the Space of Representation

3.1 Variations of the Space of Representation in Relation to the Levels of Consciousness

It is a commonplace that during sleep the consciousness abandons its everyday interests. It also pays less attention to stimuli originating from the external senses, responding to them only when the impulses pass a certain threshold or touch on a "sensitive point."

The profusion of images during dreaming sleep reveals the vast number of correlative perceptions occurring. It is clear, at the same time, that external stimuli are not only attenuated but also transformed so as to facilitate the conservation of that level of consciousness.[12]

Certainly, the way of being of the consciousness in sleep is not a way of not being in the world. Rather, it is a particular way of being and acting in the world, even when the activity is directed toward the internal world. Hence, if during sleep with dreams the images help to conserve that level by transforming external perceptions, they are also working in conjunction with deep tensions and relaxations and with the energetic economy of the intrabody. The same thing takes place with the images in our "daydreams," and it is precisely in this intermediary level that we gain access to the dramatizations proper to the impulses that are being translated from one sense to another.

In vigil, images not only contribute to the recognition of perceptions but also tend to direct the activity of the body toward the external world. Also, we necessarily have an internal register of these images, through which they influence the behavior of the intrabody.[13] However, these phenomena are perceptible only in a secondary way, and then only when the interest is directed toward the muscular tonicity and motor activity. Thus, the situation can undergo rapid change when the consciousness configures itself "emotionally" and the register of the inner body is amplified, while at the same time the images continue to act upon the external world. On other occasions the images may, as a "tactical adaptation of the body," inhibit all activity. These adaptations may subsequently be judged to have been correct or mistaken, but in any case there can be no doubt that they are behavioral adaptations in facing the world.

As we have already seen, images referred to internal and external space must be located at different depths of the space of representation in order to carry out their functions. During sleep I am able to see images as if I were observing them from a point located inside the scene itself (as if I were in the scene and looked at things from "me," without seeing myself from "outside"). From this perspective I believe not that I am seeing "images" but rather perceptual reality itself. This occurs because, unlike when I close my eyes in vigil, I do not have a register of the boundary within which the images appear, and so I believe that I am, with open eyes, seeing what is happening "outside myself."

However, in this case the delineating images do not mobilize muscle tonicity because, even though I believe I am perceiving "external" space, in reality the image is located in the space of representation. So while my eyes follow the movements of the images, my bodily movements are attenuated in the same way that perceptions originating through external senses are attenuated and translated. This is similar to the case of hallucination, except that, as we will see,

in hallucinations the register of the tactile-coenesthetic boundary has for some reason disappeared, whereas in the previously discussed case of sleep, it is not that such boundaries have disappeared but simply that they cannot exist.

Images placed in this way surely delineate their action toward the intrabody, utilizing various transformations and dramatizations that also allow us to restructure situations already lived—updating our memories, and certainly decomposing and recomposing emotions that were originally structured along with the image. Paradoxical sleep (and in some ways "reverie") fulfills important functions, among which the transference of affective climates to transformed images should not be overlooked.[14]

There exists at least one other case of placement in the oneiric scene: the case in which I see myself "from outside," that is, I see the scene in which I am included and carry out actions, but from a point of observation external to the scene. This case is similar to the one in vigil in which I see myself "from outside" (as happens when, in a theatrical performance or otherwise feigning, I represent or portray a certain attitude). The difference is, however, that when vigilic I have an apperception of myself (I regulate, control, and modify my activity), and when in sleep I "believe" in the scene as it presents itself, because in this situation my self-criticism is reduced and the direction of the dream sequence seems to be outside my control.

3.2 Variations of the Space of Representation in States of Altered Consciousness

In order to address the phenomena of altered states of consciousness, we must leave aside the traditionally established differences between illusion and hallucination. Let us take as a reference those images that, because of their characteristics, are often taken for perceptions from the external world. Of course, there is more to an "altered state" than this; nonetheless, that is the aspect that concerns us here. It can occur that a person in vigil will "project" images, mistaking them for real perceptions from the external world. In this case, the person will believe in these images in the same way as the dreaming person mentioned earlier, in which the dreamer was unable to distinguish between internal and external spaces because the tactile-coenesthetic boundary of the head and eyes could not be included in the system of representation. Moreover, both the scene and the subject's look are located in the interior of the space of representation, but without any notion of "interiority."

Accordingly, if someone in vigil loses the notion of "interiority," it is because the register that divides the internal from the external has somehow disappeared. Nonetheless, images projected "outside" retain their delineating power, launching motor activity toward the world. Subjects in this situation would find themselves in a peculiar state of "waking dream," of active semi-sleep, in which their behavior in the external world has lost all efficiency in regard to objects. This can reach a point where these subjects end up talking with people who are not there or acting inappropriately in other ways.

Such situations are frequently seen in cases of fever, hypnosis, and sleepwalking. Occasionally they may also occur at the moment of entering or leaving sleep. Certainly, they can also be observed in some cases of intoxication, as well as in particular kinds of mental disturbances. The phenomena that allow this projection of images correspond to a kind of tactile-coenesthetic "anesthesia" in which images lose their "boundaries" when the sensation that serves as the reference dividing "external" and "internal" space is lacking.

There are various sensory deprivation experiments in which the “limits” of the body seem to disappear and subjects experience variations in the dimensions of different parts of their bodies. Hallucinations are also common in those situations in which a subject, suspended in complete silence and total darkness, floats in a saturated saline solution that is maintained at skin temperature. Then, for example, gigantic butterflies may seem to flap their wings in front of the subject’s open eyes. The subject may later recognize this image as “originating” in the functioning (or malfunctioning) of his or her lungs.

There are a number of questions that might follow from this example. Why, for instance, is the pulmonary register translated and projected as “butterflies” in this case? Why do other subjects in the same situation not experience hallucinations at all? Why does a third group project rising hot-air balloons, for example, rather than butterflies? It is clear that the allegories that correspond to the impulses of the intrabody cannot be separated from the personal memory, which is also a system of representation. We can see this in the case of ancient forms of sensory deprivation (for example, the solitary caves sought out by mystics of an earlier age). In this way people obtained adequate results, in terms of hypnogogic translations and projections, especially when combined with other practices that amplify the registers of the intrabody such as fasting, prayer, and sleep deprivation. The world’s religious literature abounds with references to such phenomena, with accounts of both the procedures used and the outcomes obtained. It can clearly be seen that, apart from the particular visions of each experimenter, there are other images that correspond to the representations of the subject’s particular religious culture.

The same phenomena occasionally occur in proximity to death. In these situations we find projections that correspond specifically to each subject, as well as others related to elements of the culture and era in which the subject lives. Even in the laboratory, hypnogogic images with both personal and cultural substrata can often be provoked with experiments using the Meduna mixture of gases, as well as through hyperventilation, carotid and ocular pressure, stroboscopic lights, and so forth.

What is important for us, however, is the conformation of those images, as well as the location of the “look” and “scene” in different depths and levels of the space of representation. It is in this regard that the reports from individuals subjected to conditions of sensory deprivation are often so interesting. Even in cases where there are no hallucinations, the reports nearly always agree on a number of points. Besides feeling “disoriented” about the position of their limbs and head, subjects often speak about the difficulty of knowing exactly whether their eyes were open or closed, and of the impossibility of perceiving the boundary between their bodies and the space around them.[15]

From all of this we are led to certain conclusions. Certainly among them would be the observation that activity toward the external world is impeded with the internalization of the motor representation. That is, as in the example of the keyboard located “inside” the head rather than “in front of” the eyes, the location of the image more “internally” than is required in order to delineate action blocks the body’s movement toward the external world.[16]

With respect to the anesthesia mentioned earlier, the loss of the sensation of the “boundary” between internal and external space prevents the correct placement of the image; hence, hallucinations can be produced when these images are externalized. On the other hand, in semi-sleep (daydreams and paradoxical sleep), the internalization of images acts upon the intrabody. And in the situation of “emotional consciousness,” numerous images tend to act upon the intrabody.

3.3 The Nature of the Space of Representation

We have not been speaking of a space of representation *per se* or of a quasi-mental space. Rather, we have said that representation as such cannot be independent of spatiality, though we are not thereby maintaining that representation *occupies* space. It is the form of spatial representation that concerns us here. So it is that when we speak of a "space of representation" rather than simply of representation itself, it is because we are considering the ensemble of perceptions and (non-visual) images that provide the registers (the corporal tone, as well as that of the consciousness) on the basis of which I recognize myself as "me." That is, I recognize myself as a continuum despite the flow and changes that I experience. So the space of representation is not such because it is an empty container to be filled with phenomena of consciousness, but rather because its nature is representation, and when particular images occur, the consciousness cannot present them other than under the form of extension. Thus, we might also have emphasized the *material* aspect of what is being represented without thereby speaking of its substantiality in the same sense as would physics or chemistry; rather, we would be referring to the *hyletic* data, that is, to the material data and not to materiality itself.

We are left, however, with a difficulty. Of course, no one would think that the consciousness has color or that it is a colored container simply because visual representations are presented as colored. So when we say that the space of representation possesses different levels and depths, is it because we are speaking of a three-dimensional space with volume? Or is it that the perceptual-representational structure of my coenesthesia is presented as having volume? Undoubtedly the latter is the case, and it is thanks to this that my representations may appear above or below, to the left or the right, toward the front or back, and that my "look" may also have a particular perspective toward the image.

3.4 Copresence, Horizon, and Landscape in the System of Representation

We can consider the space of representation the "scene" in which the representation, excluding the "look," is given. Clearly, such a scene involves a structure of images that draws on numerous perceptual sources and previously perceived images.

For each structure of representation that appears in the scene there exist innumerable alternatives that are not completely unfolded but rather act copresently. Of course, here we are not speaking of "manifest" and "latent" contents or the "associative pathways" that can lead the image in one direction or another. For example, consider the theme of linguistic expressions and meanings. While trying to decide what to say, I can observe that there are numerous alternatives to choose among. I make these choices not by following a lineal associative direction, but rather in relation to meanings. These meanings are related, in turn, to the overall meaning of what I am going to say. In this way we can understand whatever is said as a meaning expressed in a particular region of objects. It is clear that I could extend myself to another region of objects that is non-homogenous with the overall meaning that I wish to transmit. However, I refrain from doing this precisely so as not to destroy the transmission of the overall meaning. What this makes clear is that there are other regions of objects copresent in my discourse, and that I could let myself be taken by aimless "free association" within the chosen region. But even in this case I can see that such associations correspond to other regions, to other meaningful totalities.

In this example of language, my discourse is developed in a region of meanings and expressions. It is structured within the limits set by a “horizon” and separated from other regions, which in turn are structured by other objects or by other relations between objects.

In this way the notion of a scene in which the images are given corresponds approximately to the idea of a region limited by a horizon proper to the system of representation that is acting. We can look at it in this way: When I represent the keyboard, the ambit and the objects that surround it in the region, which in this case I could call the “room,” are acting copresently. Hence, I discover that not only are alternatives of a material type acting (adjacent objects within the ambit), but that those alternatives are multiplied into different temporal and substantial regions, and this grouping into regions does not correspond to the form “all objects belonging to the class.…”

I constitute the world in which I perceive and carry out my daily routine, not only through representations that allow me to recognize and act but also through copresent systems of representation. The structuring that I make in the world I call a “landscape,” and I can verify that *the perception of the world is always a recognition and interpretation of a reality according to my landscape. This world, which I take to be reality, is my own biography in action, and the action of transformation that I carry out in the world is my own transformation*. When I speak about my internal world I am also speaking about the interpretation that I make of it and the transformation that I carry out in it.

The distinctions that we have made until now between “internal” and “external” space, based on the register of boundaries set by the tactile-coenesthetic perceptions, cannot be maintained when we speak about this globality of the consciousness in the world, for which the world is its “landscape” and the I its “look.” *This mode of consciousness-being-in-the-world is basically a mode of action in perspective, whose immediate spatial reference is the body itself, not simply the intrabody. But the body, while being an object of the world, is also an object of the landscape and an object of transformation, and in this way it ends up becoming a prosthesis of human intentionality.*

If images allow recognition and action, then according to the structure of the landscape and the needs of individuals and peoples (or according to what they consider their needs to be), they will, in the same way, tend to transform the world.

Notes to Psychology of the Image

[1] "What in our innocence of phenomenological niceties we take for mere facts: that a spatial thing always appears to 'us humans' in a certain 'orientation,' oriented, for instance, in the visual field of view as above and below, right and left, near and far; that we can see a thing only at a certain 'depth' or 'distance'; that all the changing distances at which it can be seen are related to a center of all depth-orientations 'localized' by us in the head, invisible though familiar to us as an ideal limiting point—all these alleged facts (*Faktizitaten*), contingencies of spatial perception which are foreign to the 'true,' 'objective' space, reveal themselves down to the most trivial empirical subdivisions (*Besonderungen*) as essential necessities. Thus we see that not only for us human beings, but also for God—as the ideal representative of absolute knowledge—whatever has the character of a spatial thing is intuitable only through appearances, wherein it is given, and indeed must be given, as changing 'perspectively' in varied yet determined ways, and thereby presented in changing 'orientations.'

"We must now seek not only to establish this as a general thesis, but also to follow it up into all its particular formations. The problem of the '*origin of the presentation of space*,' the deepest phenomenological meaning whereof has never yet been grasped, reduces itself to the phenomenological analysis of the *essential* nature of all the noematic (and noetic) phenomena, wherein space exhibits itself intuitionally and as the unity of appearances, and the descriptive modes of such exhibiting 'constitutes' the spatial." *Ideas General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology,* E. Husserl (New York: Collier, 1975, Section 150).

[2] In section 6 of the Epilogue to *Ideas* Husserl says: "For those who live in the habits of thought prevailing in the science of nature it seems to quite obvious that purely psychic being or psychic life, is to be considered a course of events similar to natural ones, occurring in the quasi-space of consciousness. Evidently and in principle, it makes no difference in this regard whether one lets the psychic data be blown into aggregates "atomistically," like shifting heaps of sand, even though in conformity with empirical laws, or whether they are considered parts of wholes which, by necessity, either empirical or *a priori,* can behave individually only as such parts within a whole—at the highest level perhaps in the whole that is consciousness in its totality, which is bound to a fixed form of wholeness. In other words, atomistic psychology, as well as Gestalt psychology, both retain the sense and the principle of psychological "naturalism" (as we have defined it above) or "sensualism," as it can also be named if we recall the use of the term "inner sense." Clearly, even Brentano's psychology of intentionality remains tied to this traditional naturalism, although it has brought about a reformation by introducing into psychology the descriptive concept of intentionality as a universal and fundamental one". *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* Second Book (Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution), E. Husserl, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989, Epilogue, section 6 pg. 423).

[3] *Grundformen und Erkenntinis menslichen Daseins,* L. Binswanger (Zurich: Niehans, 1953); *Ausgewahlte Vortrage und Aufsatze* (Francke Berna, 1955). See "La Psychanlyse existentiale de Ludwig Binswanger," Henri Niel, *Critique* (October 1957). Quoted in *Histoire de la Psychologie,* Fernand Lucien Mueller (Paris: Payot, 1976).

[4] This discussion began long ago. Sartre, in his critical study on the various conceptions of imagination, says: "Associationism lived on among certain tardy partisans of the theory of cerebral localization, and was latent among a host of writers who were unable to dispose of it despite every effort. The Cartesian doctrine of pure thought that is capable of replacing the image on the very terrain of imagination returned to favor through Buhler. A large number of psychologists finally

maintained with R. P. Peillaube the compromise theory of Leibniz. Experimentalists such as Binet and the Wurzburg psychologists claimed to have noted the existence of imageless thoughts. Other psychologists no less devoted to fact, such as Titchener and Ribot, denied the existence and even the possibility of such thoughts. Matters had not advanced one step beyond the time of the publication of Leibniz's reply to Locke in the *New Essays.*

"For the point of departure had not changed. In the first place, the old conception of images had been retained. In a more subtle form, no doubt. Experiments such as those of Spaier revealed, to be sure, a sort of life where, thirty years earlier, only static elements had been seen. Images have their dawn and their dusk, and change form under the gaze of consciousness. The investigations of Philippe doubtless revealed a progressive schematization of images in the unconscious. Generic images were admitted to exist, the work of Messer revealing a host of indeterminate representations in consciousness, and Berkeleyan particularism was abandoned. With Bergson, Revault d'Allonnnes, Betz and others, the old notion of schemata came back into fashion. But there was no surrender of principle. The image was an independent psychic content capable of assisting thought but also subject to its own laws. And although a biological dynamism replaced the traditional mechanistic conception the essence of the image continued nonetheless to be passivity." *Imagination: A Psychological Critique,* J.P. Sartre, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962, pp. 75–76).

[5] "Every psychic fact is a synthesis. Every psychic fact is a form, and has a structure. This is common ground for all contemporary psychologists, and is completely in accord with the data of reflection. Unfortunately, these contentions have their origin in a priori ideas. In agreement with the data of inner sense, they do not originate there, in inner experience. Psychologists have thus resembled in their undertakings those mathematicians who wanted to retrieve the continuum by means of discontinuous elements. Psychic synthesis was to be retrieved by starting from elements furnished by a priori analysis of certain logical-metaphysical concepts. The image was one of those elements, and reveals, in our opinion, the most decisive rout experienced by synthetic psychology. The attempt was made to soften the image, to refine it, to render it as fluid and as transparent as possible, so that it would not prevent syntheses from taking place. And when certain writers realized that even thus disguised, images were bound to shatter the continuity of the psychic stream, they rejected images entirely, as pure Scholastic entities. But they failed to realize that their criticism had to do with a certain conception of images, not images themselves. All the trouble lay in having come to images with the idea of synthesis, instead of deriving a certain conception of synthesis from reflection upon images. The problem raised was the following one: How can the existence of images be reconciled with the requirements of synthesis? They failed to realize that an atomistic conception of images was already contained in the very manner of formulating the problem. There is no avoiding the straightforward answer that so long as images are inert psychic contents, there is no conceivable way to reconcile them with the requirements of synthesis. An image can only enter into consciousness, if it is itself a synthesis, not an element. There are not, and never could be, images in consciousness. Rather, an image is a certain type of consciousness. An image is an act, not some thing. An image is a consciousness of some thing." *Imagination: A Psychological Critique,* Sartre, p. 146.

[6] This is probably the source of confusion that has led thinkers such as Bergson to affirm: "An image may *be* without *being perceived;* it may be present without being represented."

[7] By 1943, it had been observed in laboratories that some individuals have a tendency to favor auditory, tactile, or coenesthetic images over visual ones. This led G. Walter in 1967 to formulate a classification of imaginative types according to their predominant sense. Independently of his claims, the idea gained ground among psychologists that recognition of one's own body in space or the memory of an object were quite often not based on visual images. Moreover, they began to consider the case of perfectly normal subjects who described their "blindness" as regards visual

representations. From this point on it could no longer be maintained that visual images should be considered the nucleus of the system of representation, relegating other imaginative forms to the dustbin of "eidetic disintegration" or the field of literature, where "idiots" and "morons" say things like: "I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark." *The Sound and the Fury,* William Faulkner (New York: Vintage, 1954, pp. 88–89).

[8] Recall the example of the modification of space that Sartre gives in *The Emotions: Outline of a Theory*. There he speaks of a ferocious animal that suddenly leaps toward us threateningly. In this situation, even though the animal is caged we are startled, and it is as if the distance that separates us had disappeared. The same phenomena are also described by the character Kolnai in *Nausea.* He describes the sensation of revulsion as a defense when faced with the advance of the warm, viscous, and vitally diffuse, which gets closer until it "sticks" to the observer. For him, the reflex of vomiting in front of the "disgusting" is a rejection, a visceral expulsion of a sensation that has been "introduced" into his body. We think that in both these cases representation plays a central role, being superimposed on the perception and modifying it. We can see this in the case of the "dangers" that are ignored by a child but become matters of importance for the adult who has previously suffered mishaps. In the second case the rejection of the "disgusting" is affected by memories associated with the object, or particular aspects of the object. How else could we explain that one and the same food can be treated as a gastronomic delicacy by a particular group of people and as unacceptable or even repugnant by another? Furthermore, how would we understand the phobias or "unjustified" fears someone might have about an object that to other eyes seems harmless? Since perceptions do not differ so drastically among normal subjects, the differences must be in the image, or rather in the structuring of the image.

[9] It should be understood that when we speak of the "world" we are referring as much to the so-called "internal" as to the so-called "external" world. It is also clear that this dichotomy is accepted because in this exposition we are placing ourselves in the naive or habitual position. It is useful to recall the comments in Chapter 1, Paragraph 1 regarding falling once again naively into the world of the "natural psyche."

[10] As if… this object were similar to another one that I am familiar with; as if something had happened to this object that I know; as if it were missing some characteristics to become that other already known object, etc.

[11] We use the word "look" with a meaning that extends beyond the visual. Perhaps it would be more correct to speak of a "point of observation." Thus, when we say "look," we could refer to a non-visual register (kinesthetic, for example) that still involves a representation.

[12] Even though the attitude of abandoning daily interests is rejected in the vigilic state, the tendency toward preserving the level also occurs there. Vigil and sleep tend to run through their respective cycles, replacing each other in a more or less foreseeable sequence, very different from the case of daydreaming and paradoxical sleep (sleep with visual images), which at times erupt into these levels. Perhaps this situation, which we could call semi-sleep, corresponds to reaccommodations or "distancings" that allow the level to be preserved.

[13] How can we explain somatization without understanding the capacity that internal images possess to modify the body? An understanding of this phenomenon should contribute to the development of a psychosomatic medicine, in which the body and its functions (or dysfunctions) could be globally reinterpreted in the context of intentionality. From this perspective, the human body would be seen as a *prosthesis* of the consciousness in its activity toward the world.

[14] However, investigating these topics would take us far from our central theme. A complete theory of the consciousness (which is not what we are attempting here) will need to take all these phenomena into account.

[15] Doubtless the experiences described above deserve clever neurophysiological explanations, but these would not be related to our theme, nor could they resolve the questions we are considering.
[16] After suffering a powerful fright or a serious conflict, subjects can observe that their limbs do not respond to their will; this paralysis may last only a brief moment or it may persist. Such cases as the sudden loss of speech as a consequence of emotional shock correspond to the same range of phenomena.

Historiological Discussions

Introduction to Historiological Discussions

My objective in this work is to clarify the prerequisites for a foundation of historiology. It is clear that knowledge of the dates of historical events will not in itself, even when supported by the latest research techniques, be sufficient to establish a claim that such knowledge is scientific. That is, historiology will not become a science through the mere fact of wanting to—no matter how ingenious the contributions made to it or how great the quantity of information accumulated. Rather, it will become a science by overcoming the difficulties it encounters in justifying its initial premises.

The present writing does not present an ideal or desired model of historical construction; instead, it addresses the possibility of coherently constructing the historical. Of course, our understanding of the term “history” in this essay differs greatly from the classical use. Let us remember that in his *Historia Animalium* Aristotle described history as an activity of searching for information. Over time, this activity became a simple narrative of successive events. And so, history (or historiography) wound up being a knowledge of chronologically ordered “facts.” In this way it remains dependent on the availability of what are at times scarce and at other times abundant source materials. However, what is most disconcerting in all of this is that the fragments obtained through such research are presented as historical reality itself, all based on the assumption that the historian has not established an order, has not prioritized information, and has not structured the narrative based on the selection and expurgation of source material. Thus we have reached a situation where it is believed that the task of historiology is not interpretive.

Defenders of this attitude today acknowledge certain technical and methodological difficulties. Nonetheless, they continue to insist that their work is valid because their intention is dedicated to a respect for historical truth (in the sense of not falsifying the facts), and they are vigilant to avoid any *a priori* metaphysical distortions.

From the above it can be seen that historiography has become a sort of covert moralism, justified as scientifically rigorous, that begins by considering historical phenomena as seen from “outside,” obscuring the fact of the historian’s “look” and therefore the distortions it introduces.

This will not be our approach. Our interest is an interpretation or philosophy of history that goes beyond the orderly narrative or simple “chronicle” (as Benedetto Croce ironically calls it). Moreover, it is not a matter of concern if such a philosophy is based on a sociology, a theology, or even a psychology, provided it is at least minimally conscious of the intellectual construction that accompanies the doing of historiography.

In conclusion, let me note that we will often use the term “historiology” rather than “historiography” or “history.” This is because the latter two terms have been used with such varied implications by so many authors that today there is considerable confusion surrounding their meanings. We will use “historiology” in the sense in which Ortega y Gasset[1] coined it, and the word “history” (lowercase) to refer to historical fact and not the science in question.

Chapter 1: The Past as Viewed from the Present

1.1 The Distortion of Mediated History

First, it would be worthwhile to clear up some problems that hinder the clarification of the fundamental problems of historiology. While these errors are numerous, considering even a few of them will help eliminate a certain *mode* of approaching these themes that leads directly to an obscuring of concrete history, not because of a lack of data but rather because of the specific interference of the historian in dealing with the data in question.

Even in the writings of the "Father of History" an interest can clearly be seen in emphasizing the differences between his people and the barbarians.[2] And in Titus Livius the narrative is transformed in order to contrast the virtues of the old Republic with the period of the Empire in which the author lives.[3] This purposeful method of presenting facts and customs is foreign neither to historians of the East or the West. They have, from the very beginnings of written narrative, constructed a particular history out of the landscape of their epoch. Affected as they were by their times, many manipulated the facts not with any malice, but on the contrary, considering that their task was to bring out the "historical truth" that had been suppressed or hidden by the powerful.[4]

There are many ways in which one's own present landscape can be introduced into the description of the past. Sometimes history is told, or an attempt is made to influence it, through the use of legend or the pretext of a literary work. One of the clearest such cases can be found in Virgil's *Aeneid.*[5]

Religious literature, in turn, often shows the distortions of interpolation, expurgation, and translation. When these errors have been intentionally committed, we are dealing with cases where the alteration of past situations may be explained by the "zeal" inspired by the historian's own landscape. Even when errors have simply slipped in for other reasons, we are still left at the mercy of facts that can only be clarified by applying the techniques of historiology.[6]

There also exists manipulation of the source texts on which the historical commentary relies, carried out with the intention of supporting a certain thesis. Systematic misrepresentation of this type has become important, for example, in the contemporary production of daily news.[7]

In addition, there are the not insignificant defects of oversimplification and stereotyping. These tendencies have the advantage of minimizing the work involved in trying to give a global and definitive interpretation of the facts, valuing or discrediting them in accordance with the more or less accepted model. The problem with such procedures is that they allow the construction of "histories" in which second-hand information or hearsay is substituted for facts.

There are, then, numerous forms of distortion. But surely the least evident (and most decisive) is that located not in the historian's pen but in the heads of those who read the historian and accept or reject that description in accordance with how it fits their particular beliefs and interests—or the beliefs and interests of a group, a people, or an entire culture—in a certain historical moment. This type of personal or collective "censorship" is not open for discussion since it is taken as reality itself, and it is only when events finally clash with what is *believed* to be "reality" that the prejudices held until that moment are finally swept away.

Of course, when we speak of “beliefs” we are referring to the sorts of pre-predicative formulations of which Husserl spoke, and that appear as much in daily life as in science. Therefore, it is of little importance whether a belief has mythical or scientific roots, since in any case it involves prepredicates that have been formed previous to any rational judgment.[8] Historians and archaeologists of different times have experienced the serious difficulties presented by those situations in which data have been all but discarded because they had been considered irrelevant—and later it was precisely these same data, earlier abandoned or discredited by “good sense,” that occasioned a fundamental turning point in historiology.[9]

There are four defects in the treatment of historical fact, which we could summarize so that, to the extent possible, we can move beyond them and set aside those works that are in the grip of such approaches. The first involves the deliberate introduction of the period in which the historian lives into the narrative, as occurs in myth, religion, and literature. Another situation involves the manipulation of sources. A third, oversimplification and stereotyping, and lastly there is the kind of “censorship” produced by the prepredicates of the age. Nevertheless, if someone were to make explicit these errors or demonstrate how difficult they are to avoid, their contribution might be taken seriously inasmuch as their presentation has been made with reflection and the development can be followed rationally. Fortunately, this is often the case, and it is precisely what allows us to have a productive discussion.[10]

1.2 The Distortion of Immediate History

Any autobiography, any narrative about one’s own life (which would seem to consist of those facts that are the most indubitable*,* immediate, and well known to oneself) still suffers undeniable distortions and distance from the events that took place. Setting aside the question of bad faith—as if this were possible—let us assume that the narrative in question is being produced for oneself and not an external audience. We could use the example of a personal diary to illustrate this point. Upon rereading this type of record, authors can verify: (1) that even “facts” written down almost as they occurred nonetheless received a particular emphasis regarding certain “knots” that were significant at that time but have become less relevant in the present. Indeed, these authors may now think that they should have instead taken greater note of other aspects, and that were they to rewrite this diary they would do so in a very different way; (2) that their descriptions involved a reworking of what took place, as if they had structured things from a temporal perspective different from the present one; (3) that the values they applied at that moment are very different from those they hold at present; (4) that, encouraged by the pretext of writing the narrative, varied and at times compulsive psychological phenomena have strongly colored the descriptions to the point that today’s readers blush at what they once wrote (the candor, the forced cleverness, the exaggerated self-flattery, the undeserved self-criticisms, and so on). Continuing in this way, a fifth, a sixth, and a seventh consideration could be offered with respect to the distortion of personal historical fact. Consider, then: What may not happen when it comes to describing historical events that have been interpreted by others and that we have not lived through ourselves? So it is that historical reflection is carried out from the perspective of the historical moment in which that reflection takes place—and from this perspective it turns to modifying these events.

The line of thinking developed above may seem to exhibit a certain skepticism with respect to the faithfulness of historical description. However, it is not this point that we should focus on. From the beginning of this essay we have admitted the presence of the intellectual construction

that operates in the task of the historian, putting things in this way in order to emphasize that the historian's temporality and perspective are unavoidable themes in historiological consideration. For how is it that such distance is produced between the fact and its telling? How is it that the telling varies with the passage of time? How is it that events unfold outside of the consciousness? And what degree of relationship is there between lived-temporality and the temporality of the world about which we offer our opinions and upon which we sustain our points of view? These are just some of the questions that must be answered if we wish to provide historiology with a foundation, consecrating it as a science, or even simply to establish the possibility that historiology as such could exist. It could be argued that historiology (or historiography) already exists. Certainly this is true, but in the present state of affairs historiology has more the characteristics of a field of *knowledge* than of a *science*.

Chapter 2: The Past Seen as Without Temporal Foundation

2.1 Conceptions of History

In the last few centuries a number of writers have begun to search for a rationale or system of laws that would explain the development of historical events, but they did so without any attempt to explain the nature of events themselves. For these authors, it is no longer simply a matter of recounting events, but rather of establishing a rhythm or form that can be applied to them. They have discussed at length the problem of the historical subject, in which, once isolated, they have claimed to find the motor of events. But whether claiming the human being, nature, or God as the subject, no one has yet explained to us what historical change or movement *is.* This question has often been ignored, taking for granted that, as with space, time, too, cannot be seen in itself but only in relation to a certain substantiality. And without further ado, these writers have focused on the substantiality in question. All of this has resulted in a kind of child's jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces that do not fit are forced into place. In the numerous systems in which some rudiments of historiology appear, all the effort seems to be focused on justifying the dateability, the accepted calendar time, of facts, analyzing how they occurred, why they occurred, or how things must have occurred—without considering what this "occurring" is, how it is possible in general that something occurs. This form of proceeding in historiological matters we could call "history without temporality."

Let us look at some cases that illustrate these characteristics. Doubtless, Vico[11] contributed a new point of view regarding the treatment of history, and he is seen in some measure as the initiator of what later came to be known as "historiography." Nevertheless, this tells us nothing about what foundation he may have given to that science. Indeed, while he points out the difference between "consciousness of existence" and "science of existence," and in his reaction against Descartes raises the banner of historical knowledge, he does not thereby explain historical facts as such. Certainly, his greatest contributions lie in attempting to establish: (1) a general idea regarding the form of historical development; (2) a set of axioms; and (3) a method ("metaphysical" and philological).[12]

> Our new Science must therefore be a demonstration, so to speak, of the *historical fact of providence*, for it must be a history of the forms of the order which, without human discernment or intent, and often against the designs of men, providence has given to this great city of the human race. For though this world has been created in time and particular, the orders established therein by providence are universal and eternal.[13]

With this, Vico proposes that "this Science must therefore be a rational civil *theology* of divine providence"[14] and not a science of historical facts as such.

Vico, influenced by Plato and Augustine (in his conception of a history that participates in the eternal), anticipates numerous themes of romanticism.[15] Setting aside the idea of "clear and distinct" thought as the organizational principle, he attempted to penetrate the apparent chaos of history. His cyclical interpretation of the ebb and flow of history—based on a law of development

in three ages: divine (in which the senses predominate); heroic (fantasy); and human (reason)—had a powerful influence on the formation of the philosophy of history.

Sufficient emphasis has not been given to the nexus joining Vico with Herder,[16] but if we recognize in Vico the birth of the philosophy of history[17] and not simply the historical compilation typical of the Enlightenment, we must concede to Herder either the anticipation of or direct influence on the emergence of this discipline. Herder asks, Why is it, if everything in the world has its philosophy and its science, that what touches us most directly—the history of humanity—should not also have its own philosophy and science? Even if the three laws of development that Herder establishes are not identical to those enunciated by Vico, the idea that human evolution (starting from the human race and its natural environment) traverses different stages until it arrives at a society based on reason and justice recalls the voice of that Neapolitan thinker.

In Comte[18] the philosophy of history attains a social dimension and an explanation of the human fact. His law of the three stages (theological, metaphysical, and positive) echoes Vico's notion. Comte is not particularly concerned with clarifying the nature of those "stages," but once proposed they seem particularly useful for understanding the march of humanity and its direction—that is, the meaning of history: "On peut assurer aujourd'hui que la doctrine que aura suffisamment expliqué l'ansemble du passé obtiendra inévitablement, par suite de cette seule épreuve, la présidence mentale de l'avenir."[19] It is clear that history will serve as a tool for action within the schema of the practical destiny of knowledge, with the "voir pour prévoir."

2.2 History as Form

In Spengler,[20] as in Comte, we find an undisguised practical interest in historical prediction, in the first place because such prediction seems possible to him. As he himself wrote:

> In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still untraveled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our planet which is actually in the phase of fulfillment—the west-European-American. We are trying, I repeat, trying to track that culture into those stages of its development that have not yet taken place.[21]

Regarding his practical interests, he would have the new generations dedicate themselves to activities such as engineering, architecture, and medicine, abandoning all philosophy or abstract thought, which has already entered its "stage of decline." We see that his interests go still further when he indicates a type of politics (in both the specific and general sense) that must correspond to the present and immediate future of the culture in which he is writing.[22]

For Comte, history could still be comprehended on a human scale. His law of the three stages applied as much to humanity as to individuals in their development. For Spengler, history has already become dehumanized as a *universal biographical protoform*, which has to do only with biological man (as well as animals and plants) insofar as birth, youth, maturity, and death happen to them.

The Spenglerian vision of "civilization" as the final stage of a culture did not stop Toynbee[23] from taking civilization as the unit of research. In fact, in the introduction to his *Study of History* Toynbee discusses the problem of the minimum historical unit, discarding "national history" as isolated and unreal because history in fact corresponds to multiple entities that embrace a more extended region. What is important to him above all is the comparative study of civilizations, a

concept that we often find replaced by that of “society.” Of greatest interest (for our purposes) is Toynbee’s interpretation of the historical process. No longer is the subject of history a biological being marked by destiny, but rather an entity that, between the open and the closed, is guided by impulses or circumspection in facing obstacles.

We must also take note of Toynbee’s explanation of social movement as involving challenge and response. He does not, however, use the term “impulse” in a strictly Bergsonian sense, nor is his use of the idea of challenge-response a simple transplanting of stimulus-response or Pavlovian reflex. Finally, what is of most interest to us is his understanding that the great religions transcend the disintegration of civilizations, and that they are what allows us to have the intuition of a “plan” and a “purpose” in history. In any event, the accommodation of his model to a particular historical form kept him from an understanding of temporality.

Chapter 3: History and Temporality

3.1 Temporality and Process

Hegel has taught us (in the third book, second section of *The Science of Logic*[24]) to distinguish among mechanical, chemical, and vital processes: “The result of the mechanical process does not already exist before that process; its end is not in its beginning, as in the case of the teleological end. The product is a determinateness in the object as an externally posited one.” Its process is, moreover, externality that does not affect its sameness and that is not explained by its sameness. Further on he will tell us: “Chemism is itself the first negation of indifferent objectivity and the externality of its determinateness; it is, therefore, still infected with the immediate self-subsistence of the object and with externality. Consequently it is not yet for itself that totality of self-determination that proceeds from it and in which rather it is sublated.” Finality appears in the vital process in the measure that the living individuals, in the face of the presupposed objective world, are put into tension with regard to their original presuppositions and positioned as the subject, in-itself and for-itself…

It was some time after the death of Hegel before that outline of vitality became the central theme of a new point of view, the “life-philosophy” of Wilhelm Dilthey. He understood “life” not only as psychic life but as a unity found in that permanent change of state in which consciousness, constituted in relation to the external world, is a moment of subjective identity of this structure in process. Time is the form of correlation between subjective identity and the world. The passage of time appears as an experience and has a teleological character: It is a process with direction. Dilthey has a clear intuition but does not claim to construct a scientific edifice. For him, in the end, all truth is reduced to objectivity, and, as Zubiri points out, applying this to any truth means that everything, even the principle of contradiction, will be a simple fact. In this way, though he is reluctant to seek a foundation of a scientific nature, Dilthey’s brilliant intuitions in the philosophy of life will have a powerful influence on the new current of thought.

Dilthey explains history from “within,” from where it is given, within life, but he does not stop to describe with precision the nature of *becoming.* It is here that we encounter phenomenology, which, after successive and exhaustive approaches, promises to confront the fundamental problems of historiology. Surely, the difficulty phenomenology faces in justifying the existence of another “I,” different from one’s own, and in general in showing the existence of a world different from the “world” obtained after the *epoché,* extends to the problem of historicity inasmuch as it is external to lived experience. It is often said that phenomenological solipsism turns subjectivity into a monad “without doors or windows,” to use the phrase so dear to Leibniz. But is this really the case? If so, the possibility of basing historiology on indubitable principles, like those obtained by philosophy treated as a *rigorous science*, would be seriously compromised.

It is clear that historiology cannot simply take its guiding principles from the natural sciences or mathematics and incorporate them without further ado as part of its own legacy. Here we are speaking of justifying historiology as a science, and hence there is a need to *assist* its emergence without appealing to the simple “evidence” of the existence of the historical event, in order to then derive from it a science of history. No one can fail to notice the difference between simply being occupied with a field of facts and transforming that field into a science. As Husserl

comments in discussion with Dilthey, it is not a question of doubting the truth of a fact, but of knowing whether one can be justified in raising it to a universality of principle.

The major problem surrounding historiology is that as long as the nature of time and historicity are not understood, the concept of *process* appears artificially grafted onto its explanations, rather than the explanations deriving from the concept. That is why we must insist that a rigorous approach be taken with this problem. But time and again philosophy has had to abandon its attempts to develop such an explanation—for example, in the case of its endeavor to be a positive science, as in Comte; a science of logic, as in Hegel; a critique of language, as in Wittgenstein; or a science of propositional calculus, as in Russell. Therefore, when phenomenology does in fact appear to fulfill the requirements of a *rigorous science*, we are led to ask whether there is in it the possibility of giving a foundation to historiology. Before this can happen, however, we must deal with a few difficulties.

Centering on our theme, we ask: Is Husserl's inadequate response regarding historicity due simply to the incomplete development of this particular point, or is it that phenomenology itself is incapable of becoming a science of intersubjectivity, of *worldliness*—that is, of the temporal facts external to subjectivity?[25]

In *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl says:

> If perchance it could be shown that everything constituted as part of my peculiar ownness, including then the reduced "world," belonged to the concrete essence of the constituting subject as an inseparable internal determination, then, in the Ego's self-explication, his peculiarly own world would be found as "inside" and, on the other hand, when running through that world straightforwardly, the Ego would find himself as a member among its "externalities" and would distinguish between himself and "the external world."[TR.1]

This invalidates in great measure what he established in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy,* inasmuch as the constitution of the "I" as "I and the surrounding world" belongs to the field of the natural attitude.

What we find is a great distance between the thesis of 1913 (*Ideas*) and that of 1929 (*Fifth Cartesian Meditation*). The latter is what brings us closer to the concept of "opening," of being-open-to-the-world as what is essential to the I. Here we find the connecting thread that will allow other thinkers to find being-there, without involving an isolated phenomenological "I" that could not constitute itself except in its existence or, as Dilthey would say, "in its life."

Here let us make a short digression, before again returning to Husserl.

When Abenhazan[26] explains that human activity is carried out in order to "distract oneself," he shows that "placing oneself before" is at the root of doing. If a historiology "seen from outside" were constructed on the basis of that thought, surely it would try to explain historical facts through distinct modes of doing with reference to this type of distraction. If, on the other hand, an attempt were made to organize that historiology "seen from within," it would try to find a reason for the historical human fact, starting from the "placing oneself before." This would result, then, in two very different types of exposition, search, and verification.

The second approach would bring us closer to an explication of the essential characteristics of historical facts, insofar as they are produced by the human being, whereas the former would leave us with a mechanistic and psychologistic explanation of history, without an understanding of how that simple "distraction" can engender processes and be itself a process. This is the form of understanding things that, in diverse philosophies of history, has held sway until today. But

this approach has not taken those philosophies much beyond what Hegel conveyed to us in his study of mechanical and chemical processes.

It is clear that up until the time of Hegel such positions were acceptable. However, to continue with them after his explanations denotes, at the very least, a kind of intellectual shortsightedness for which it would be difficult to compensate simply through historical erudition. Abenhazan points to doing as a distancing of oneself from what we could call "placing oneself before," or the Heideggerian "being-already-in (the world) as being-together-with." Insofar as its existence, all human structure is projection, and in this projection the existent play with their destiny.

If we put things in this way we would have to offer an explanation of temporality, because it is the comprehension of temporality that would allow us to understand the pro-ject, the "placing oneself before." This sort of exegesis is not incidental but unavoidable. There is no way to understand how temporality occurs in events, that is, how they gain temporality in a conception of history, other than by including the intrinsic temporality of those who produce these events. Thus, it is useful to agree: *Either history is an occurring that reduces the human being to an epiphenomenon, in which case we can speak only of natural history (unjustified because among other things it omits human construction), or it is human history (among other things capable of explaining construction of all sorts)*.

For my part, I hold to this second position.

Let us review, then, what of significance has been said regarding the theme of temporality.

Hegel has illustrated for us the dialectic of movement but not that of temporality. He defines temporality as the "abstraction of consuming," locating it along with "place" and "movement" following the tradition of Aristotle (particularly his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences,* the chapter "Philosophy of Nature").

Hegel tells us that the being of time is the now. And inasmuch as the now is a "no longer" or "not yet," it is, consequently, like a non-being. If we take the "now" from temporality, clearly it becomes an "abstraction of consuming." But the problem persists, inasmuch as "consuming" itself takes place in time. Moreover, we cannot understand how, as he later explains, from the linear placing of infinite nows it is possible to obtain a temporal sequence.

> Negativity, which relates itself as point to space, and which develops in space its determinations as line and surface, is, however, just as much for itself in the sphere of Being-outside-of-itself, and so are its determinations therein, though while it is positing as in the sphere of Being-outside-of-itself, it appears indifferent as regards the things that are tranquilly side by side. As thus posited for itself, it is time. (cited by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Section 82, H 429)[TR.2]

Heidegger tells us that both the naive as well as the Hegelian conceptions of time, sharing as they do the same perception, occur through the leveling and covering that hides the historicity of the being-there, for whom the passing of time is not, at bottom, a simple horizontal alignment of "nows." This involves, in reality, the phenomenon of turning the look away from "the end of being-in-the-world" by means of an infinite time that for all intents and purposes could not be, and as a consequence could not affect the end of the being-there.[27] In this fashion, temporality has until now been inaccessible, hidden by the common conception of time that characterized it as an *irreversible* "one after another."

> Why cannot time be reversed? Especially if one looks exclusively at the stream of "nows," it is incomprehensible in itself why this sequence should not present itself in the reverse direction. The impossibility of this reversal has its basis in the way public time originates in temporality, the temporalizing of which is primarily futural and "goes" to its end ecstatically in such a way that it "is" already towards its end.[TR.3]

So it is only starting from the temporality of the "being-there" that one can comprehend how mundane time is inherent to temporality. And the temporality of the being-there is a structure in which past and future times coexist (but not side by side as aggregates), and the latter exist as projects or, more radically, as "protensions" necessary to intentionality (as Husserl taught). In reality, the primacy of the future explains the being-already-in-the-world as the ontological root of being-there. This is, of course, of enormous consequence, and affects our historiological investigation. Heidegger himself says:

> The proposition "Dasein is historical," is confirmed as a fundamental existential ontological assertion. This assertion is far removed from the mere ontical establishment of the fact that Dasein occurs in a "world-history." *But the historicality of Dasein is the basis for a possible kind of historiological understanding which in turn carries with it the possibility of getting a special grasp of the development of historiology as a science*.[TR.4]

With this, we find ourselves at the level of the pre-requisites that must necessarily be unveiled in order to justify the emergence of the science of history.

Basically, we have returned from Heidegger[28] to Husserl, not with respect to the discussion of whether or not philosophy can be a science but instead with regard to whether an existential analysis based on phenomenology is capable of giving a foundation to the science of historiology. In any case, the charges of solipsism already raised against phenomenology by Heidegger turn out to be inconsistent, and thus the temporal structurality of the being-there confirms, from another perspective, the immense value of Husserl's theory.

3.2 Horizon and Temporal Landscape

It is not necessary to discuss here how the configuration of every situation is effected through the representation of both past events and more or less possible future events, which, when compared with present phenomena, allow one to structure what has been called the "present situation." This inevitable process of representation in the face of events makes us understand that these facts can never have the structure that is attributed to them. This is why, when we speak of "landscape," we are referring to situations that always imply facts that are weighted by the "look" of the observer.

So then, if students of history fix their temporal horizon in the past, they do not thereby reach a historical setting in itself; rather, they still configure it in accordance with their own particular landscape because, insofar as representation is concerned, their present study of the past is articulated in the same way as any other study of situation. This leads us to reflect on those lamentable attempts in which historians endeavor to "introduce" themselves into a selected historical setting with the objective of reliving these past events, never realizing that in the end they are introducing their own present landscape. In light of these considerations, we should note that an important aspect of historiology must be the study of the historian's landscape, because it is through the transformation of the landscapes of historians that we are able to catch

a glimpse of historical change. In this sense, those weighty writers wind up telling us more about the times in which they are writing than about the historical horizon they have chosen for their study.

The objection could be raised that the study of the landscapes of historians is also carried out from a landscape. This is indeed so, but it is this type of metalandscape that allows comparisons to be established among elements made homogeneous insofar as they pertain to the same category.

Of course, a cursory examination of the previous proposition could result in it being assimilated into almost any type of historiological vision. If a supposed historiologist held that the “will to power” was the engine of history, he might infer (following what has been said) that historians of different epochs are the representatives of the development of such a will; if he held the idea that “social class” is what produces historical movement, he might place historians as representatives of a certain class, and so on. In turn, such historiologists would see themselves as conscious champions of the aforementioned “will” or “class,” which would allow them to place their own imprint on the category “landscape.” They could attempt to study, for example, the landscape of this will to power in different historians. Nevertheless, the attempt would be only a procedure based on an expression and not on a meaning, because achieving clarity in the concept of landscape requires a comprehension of temporality that does not derive from the theory of will. For that matter, it is surprising how many historiologists have appropriated explanations of temporality foreign to their interpretive scheme, without feeling the need to clarify (from their theory) how it is that representation of the world in general and the historical world in particular is configured.

We note that the clarification carried out above is a condition for the subsequent development of ideas and not simply one more step that we can happily do without. This is one of the prerequisites for historiological discourse and cannot be discarded simply by labeling it as “psychological” or “phenomenological” (that is to say, Byzantine). Placing ourselves in opposition to those prepredicates from which designations such as the aforementioned derive, we maintain, with even greater audacity, that the category “landscape” is applicable not only to historiology but also to any vision of the world, since it allows us to emphasize the look of the one who observes the world. It is, then, a concept necessary for science in general.[29]

Even if the look of the observer—in this case the historiologist—is modified when confronting a new object, the landscape of this historiologist contributes to directing this look. If we counter this with the idea of a look that is free, oriented without assumptions with respect to a historical event that abruptly occurs (like the look attracted by reflex to a sudden stimulus in daily life), we must consider that placing oneself in front of the emerging phenomenon is already part of configuring a landscape. To maintain that in order to do science the observer must be passive contributes little to knowledge unless it is an understanding that this position is the translation of a conception of the subject as the simple reflection of external stimuli. In turn, such obedience to “objective conditions” shows the devotion to nature professed by a type of anthropology in which the human being is simply a moment of nature and therefore itself a natural being.

Certainly, in other times questions were asked and answers were given regarding the nature of the human being, without realizing that what defines the human being is, precisely, its *historicity*, and therefore its activity of transforming the world and transforming itself.[30]

On the other hand, we must recognize that just as one can make incursions from one landscape into scenes presented by different temporal horizons (as typically occurs with

historians who study an event), it is also true that within the same temporal horizon, within the same historical moment, the points of view of those who are contemporaneous and therefore coexist may coincide, although they do so from *landscapes of formation* that are different, owing to non-homogenous temporal accretions. This discovery dispels the naive view that has prevailed until only recently and highlights the enormous distance in perspective that exists between the different generations. These generations, though they occupy the same historical stage, do so from diverse situational and experiential levels.

Various authors (Dromel, Lorenz, Petersen, Wechssler, Pinder, Drerup, Mannheim, and so on) have addressed the theme of the generations, but it is Ortega y Gasset who must be recognized for having established in his *theory of generations* the key to understanding the intrinsic movement of the historical process.[31] If we are to find an explanation for the way that events unfold, we will have to make an effort similar to that of Aristotle, who in his time tried to explain movement through the concepts of potency and act. Now as then, arguments based on sensory perception prove insufficient to explain movement, and so today it is not sufficient to explain historical becoming by means of factors to which the human being responds merely passively, or as the transmission mechanism of an agent that remains external.

3.3 Human History

We have seen that the human being's open constitution refers to the world, not simply in an ontic but in an ontological sense. We have, moreover, considered that in this open constitution the future predominates as pro-ject and as finality. This constitution, projected and open, inevitably structures the moment in which it finds itself into a landscape as *present situation*. This takes place through the "intercrossing" of temporal retentions and protensions that are in no way arranged as linear "nows" but as actualizations of different times.

To this we should add: In every situation, the reference is always one's body. In the body, one's subjective moment is related to objectivity, and it is through the body that "interiority" or "exteriority" can be understood, according to the direction given to one's intention, to one's "look." Facing this body is all-that-is-not-itself, recognized as that which is not immediately dependent on one's own intentionality but susceptible to being acted upon through the intermediation of one's own body. Thus, the world in general and other human bodies within reach of one's body (of which one registers the action) set the *conditions* in which the human constitution configures its situation. These conditionings determine the situation and present themselves as *possibilities* for the future (in future relationship with one's own body). In this way, the present situation can be understood as modifiable in the future.

The world is experienced as external to the body, but the body is also seen as part of the world since it acts in the world and receives the action of the world. In this way, corporality is also a temporal configuration, a living history launched toward action, toward future possibility. The body becomes *prosthesis of the intention,* responding to placing-oneself-before-the-intention in both temporal and spatial senses—temporally, in the measure that the body can actualize in the future the possibility of intention, and spatially, insofar as representation and image of intention.[32]

The destiny of the body is the world, and insofar as it is part of the world its destiny is to transform itself. In this unfolding, objects are amplifications of corporal possibilities and the bodies of others appear as multiplications of those possibilities, insofar as they are governed by intentions recognized as similar to those that govern one's own body.

What is it about the human constitution that necessitates this transformation of the world and itself? It is the situation of temporo-spatial finitude and deficiency in which it finds itself. This situation is registered, according to the distinct conditioning factors, as pain (physical) and suffering (mental). Thus, the surpassing of pain is not simply an animal response but a temporal configuration in which the future predominates. Hence, it is a fundamental vital impulse, even when life does not find itself in a desperate situation at any given moment. Suffering in the face of danger, re-presented as future possibilities, and present actualities in which pain is present in other human beings both trigger not only a natural, immediate, reflex response but also a deferred response, along with construction to avoid pain. The surpassing of pain appears, then, as a basic project that guides action. And it is that intention which has made possible communication among diverse bodies and intentions in what we call the “social constitution.”

Social constitution is as historical as human life, it configures human life. Its transformation is continuous, but in a different way than that of nature. In the latter, changes do not take place due to intentions. Nature appears as both a “resource” for surpassing pain and suffering and a “danger” to the human constitution, and this is why the destiny of nature itself is to be humanized, *intentionalized.* And the body, inasmuch as it is natural, inasmuch as it is danger and limitation, shares the same end: to be intentionally transformed, not only in position but in motor resources; not only in exteriority but in interiority; not only in confrontation but in adaptation.

In the measure that the human horizon expands, the natural world, as nature, recedes. Social production continues and expands—but this continuity does not occur through the presence of social objects alone, objects that, while carriers of human intentions, have not (until now) been able to continue extending themselves. This continuity is given by human generations, which are not placed “one beside the other” but instead interact with and transform each other. These generations are what allows continuity and development—they are dynamic structures, social time in movement, without which society would fall back into a natural state, losing its condition as society.

It happens, moreover, that in every historical moment, generations of different temporal levels, with different retentions and protensions, coexist—and therefore configure different landscapes of situation. The bodies and behavior of children and the elderly reveal, for the active generations, the presence of what they have come from and toward what they are moving; in turn, for the extremes of that triple relationship, they reveal the other extreme of temporal position. But this never remains fixed, because while the active generations become older and the elderly die, children are transformed and begin to occupy active positions. Meanwhile, new births continuously reconstitute society.

When, through abstraction, this incessant flow is “stopped,” we can speak of a “historical moment” in which all the members who share the same social stage may be considered contemporaries, living in the same time (insofar as dateability is concerned). But they are also coetaneous in a nonhomogeneous way with respect to their internal temporality (memory, project, and landscape of situation). In reality, the generational dialectic is established among the most contiguous “strata,” which try to occupy the central activity (the social present) in accordance with their interests and beliefs. The ideas that the generations in dialectic express take shape and are founded upon the basic prepredicates of each generation’s own formation, which includes an internal register of a possible future.

Clearly, it is possible to understand the larger processes (the “molecular dynamics,” so to speak, of historical life) beginning from the smallest element, the minimum “atom” of the

historical moment. Of course, this would require the development of a complete theory of history, an undertaking that certainly lies beyond the scope of this brief essay.

3.4 The Prerequisites for Historiology

It is not for me to determine what characteristics historiology should, as a science, possess. That is the task of historiologists and epistemologists. Our concern has centered on raising the questions necessary for a fundamental understanding of historical phenomena as seen “from within.” Without this foundation, historiology could become a science of history in the formal sense, but not a science of human temporality in the profound sense.

Having understood the temporo-spatial structure of human life and its socio-generational dynamic, we are now in a position to say that without incorporating these concepts there will be no coherent historiology. Indeed, it is precisely these concepts that become the prerequisites for the future science of history.

Let us consider some final ideas. The discovery of human life as *opening* has broken the old barriers, accepted by earlier philosophies, that have existed between an “interiority” and an “exteriority.” Previous philosophies have also failed to give a sufficient account of how it is that the human being apprehends and acts within spatiality. Claiming that time and space are categories of knowledge tells us nothing about the temporo-spatial constitution of the world, and of the human being in particular. That is why an unbridgeable gap has, until now, divided philosophy and the physical-mathematical sciences. These sciences have given their own particular views about the extension and duration of the human being and its internal and external processes. The deficiencies of earlier philosophy have nevertheless permitted it a fruitful independence from the physical-mathematical sciences. This has, however, brought with it certain difficulties for understanding the human being and its *meaning*, and therefore the meaning of the world. So it is that primitive historiology has struggled in the obscurity of its fundamental concepts.

Today, understanding the structural constitution of human life and the role that temporality and spatiality play in this constitution, we are in a position to know how to act toward the future, leaving behind the “natural” being-thrown-into-the-world, leaving behind the pre history of the natural being, and intentionally generating a world history as the world is converted into the pros-thesis of human society.

Notes to Historiological Discussions

[1] "This word—historiology—is used here I believe for the first time.…" And further on: "Unacceptable in current historiography and philology is the disparity between the precision employed to get or to handle data, and the imprecision—even more, the intellectual poverty—in the use of constructive ideas.

"Against this state of affairs in the realm of History, there raises up historiology. It is moved by the conviction that History, like empirical science, above all has to be construction and not a 'gluey mass'—to use the words that Hegel hurls again and again at the historians of his time. The case that the historians could have against Hegel, by opposing [the idea] that the body of history should be constructed directly by philosophy, does not justify the tendency, even more marked in that century, of being content with a sticking together of data. With a hundredth part of what for some time has already been gathered and polished, it was enough to work out some kind of scientific conduct much more authentic and substantial than so much, in effect, that History books offer us." Translated in *Theory of History in Ortega y Gasset: The Dawn of Historical Reason,* J. T. Graham (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997, Appendix, "Hegel and Historiology"). Originally published as *La Filosofía de la Historia de Hegel y la Historiología*, J. Ortega y Gasset, *Revista de Occidente* (February 1928). Reprinted in *Kant, Hegel, Scheler* (Madrid: Alianza, 1982, pp. 61 and 72).

[2] Herodotus, 484–420 B.C.E. See e.g. *Herodotus: The Histories* (New York: Norton, 1992).

[3] Titus Livius Livy, 59 B.C.E.–17 C.E., *History of Rome* (later known as *The Decades*).

[4] For example, consider the following quotation: "I begin this work with the time when Servius Galba, with Titus Vinius for his colleague, was consul for the second time. Many authors have given accounts of the earlier period, the 820 years dating from the founding of the city, and many of them wrote of the dealings of the Roman people with eloquence and freedom. After the conflict at Actium, when for the sake of peace it became necessary that all power should be centered in one man, these great intellects vanished. And with this, history's truths suffered in many ways." *The Histories,* Tacitus*.* Unpublished translation from the Latin by Salvatore Puledda and Daniel Zuckerbrot.

[5] Virgil lived between 70 and 19 B.C.E. The poet began his masterwork as Augustus was consolidating the empire following the battle of Actium. Thanks to his earlier works, *The Bucolics* and *The Georgics,* Virgil was already a celebrity. But starting with *The Aeneid*, he gained the favor of the emperor. Of course, he was not a courtier like Theocritus or a mercenary like Pindar, but nonetheless he was someone whose interests coincided with those of officialdom.

Within the epic *Aeneid* Virgil embeds the genealogy of Rome. There he traces the history of Rome back to the moment at the end of the Trojan War when the gods prophesy to Aeneas that his descendants will govern the world. On the shield that Vulcan forges for the hero appear the images of the history that is to come, up to the central figure of Octavian (Augustus), the emperor who will bring universal peace.

In Virgil, the meaning of history is divine, because it is the gods who direct human actions to fit their own designs (as also occurs in the Homeric source of his inspiration). However, this does not prevent Virgil from interpreting this destiny from the perspective of the earthly interests of the poet and his protector. In the fourteenth century, *The Divine Comedy* will appear, in which another poet will take up the story, making Virgil the guide in his incursions through mysterious territories and considerably reinforcing the authority of the Virgilian model.

[6] Here is one such case. In reference to the Book of Daniel*,* the encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* speaks of "the still unresolved difficulties of the text." Though he does not enumerate them, we can point to some. For example, the book survives in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Hebrew and Aramaic portions fall within the Jewish canonical scriptures. The Catholic Church has recognized the seventh-century Greek version as part of its own apostolic scriptures.

The Jews do not include Daniel among their prophets but as part of their Hagiographa. On the other hand, some Christians, inspired by the Scriptures edited by the United Biblical Societies (the 1569 version of Casiodoro de Reina), find themselves with a Daniel considerably at variance with that of the Catholics, for example the version of Eloíno Nácar Fúster and A. Colunga. This does not seem to be simply a mistake, since the version of Casiodoro de Reina was revised by Cyprian de Valera (1602), with subsequent revisions appearing in 1862, 1908, and 1960. In addition, the Catholic version contains some sections that do not appear in the Protestant version, including Deuteronomy (Gr. 3, 24–90) and the Appendix (Gr. 13–14).

The greater difficulties lie not in these matters, however, but in the text itself. Here we find, for example, that the incident in which Daniel is taken to the royal palace in Babylon is placed after the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (605 B.C.E.). However, that event took place before the two other deportations that historically we know occurred in 598 and 587 B.C.E. As the scholar M. Revuelta Sañudo observes in a note to the Bible (23rd edition, *Paulinas*): “The historical references in the first six chapters are not in agreement with what history tells us. According to the text, Belshazzar is the son and immediate successor of Nebuchadnezzar and the last king in the dynasty. In reality, Nebuchadnezzar’s successor was his son Evil-Merodac (Avil-Marduk, 562–560 B.C.E.), and his fourth non-dynastic successor was Nabonidus (Nabu-na’id, 556–539), who brought to the throne his son Belshazzar. Finally, Babylon fell into the hands of Cyrus, not Darius the Mede who does not appear in the historical record.”

These historical defects should not be understood as alterations made in bad faith but as one more cumulative element in the distortion of the text. Meanwhile, the prophetic vision of Daniel gives a narrative of the succession of kingdoms in the form of allegories about the horns of a ram, which are none other than the kings: Alexander the Great; Seleucus I Nicator; Antiochus I Soter; Antiochus II Kallinikos; Seleucus III Ceraunus; Antiochus III the Great; Seleucus IV Philopater; Heliodorus; and Demetrius I Soter. Interpreting these allegories in a not very rigorous fashion, one could think that the prophetic spirit of Daniel is foretelling events that lay several centuries ahead. But if the explanation is read carefully, one sees expressions that correspond to usage more than three centuries later. Thus, he says: “The two horns of the lamb that you have seen are the kings of Medea and Persia; the ‘he-goat’ is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king, and when it breaks, the other horns appear in its place—four kings will rise in the nation, though they will not be as strong as the first.” Clearly this refers to the struggle between the Persian Empire and Macedonia (334–331 B.C.E.) and the fragmentation of Alexander’s young empire at the time of his death. Daniel appears to be prophesying events that will take place 250 years later, while in reality these are interpolations likely added under the influence of the Maccabees in the first century B.C.E., or perhaps even later under Christian influence. In 11, 1–5 we read: “Three more kings will appear in Persia, and the fourth will far surpass all the others in wealth; and when he has extended his power through his wealth, he will rouse the whole world against the kingdom of Greece. Then there will appear a warrior king. He will rule a vast kingdom and will do what he chooses. But as soon as he is established, his kingdom will be shattered and split up, north, south, east and west. It will not pass to his descendants, nor will any of his successors have an empire like his; his kingdom will be torn up by the roots and given to others as well as to them” (*The New English Bible,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Indeed, Alexander’s empire was divided at his death (323 B.C.E.) among his generals (not his descendants) into four kingdoms: Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Macedonia. In Maccabees these historical facts are given without artifice, but Maccabees was written in Hebrew, probably between 100 and 60 B.C.E.

Finally, the differences in meaning among the diverse translations are remarkable, as can be seen in comparing the Jewish and Catholic versions. With respect to Daniel 12, 4, the first says: “Many will appear and *wisdom* will increase” (from the Hebrew text edited by M. H. Leteris, translated to Spanish by A. Usqe, Buenos Aires: Editorial Estrellas, 1945), whereas the Catholic version presents

it as follows: “Many shall be lost and *iniquity* shall increase.” The historical distortion in Daniel ends up lending great prophetic authority to that book, and because of that John of Patmos uses that same system of allegorization in The Revelation of St. John (particularly 17, 1–16), with the result that the old model is reinforced and the latter book gains in prestige.

[7] The systematic manipulation of the news media has been addressed not only by historiographers and scholars in this field but also by authors of fiction, among them George Orwell, who in his book *1984* gave one of the more complete descriptions.

[8] My point of view, according to which historical fact is apprehended not as it is but as we wish to understand it, finds its justification in this, and not in a Kantian perspective that would deny the possibility of knowledge of the thing-itself, nor in a skeptical relativism with respect to the object of historical knowledge. In the same sense I have said: “Of course, the historical process will continue to be understood as the development of a form that is, when all is said and done, nothing but the mental form of those who view things in that particular way. And it does not matter what sort of dogma is appealed to, the background that dictates one’s adherence to that position will always be *that-which-one-wants-to-see.” Humanize the Earth,* “The Human Landscape,” *Silo: Collected Works, Volume I* (San Diego: Latitude Press, 2003, Chapter VII, paragraph 2).

[9] Remembering Schliemann, for example, and his (for many at the time) disconcerting discoveries.

[10] Many historians working in other fields have reasoned in this way; for example, Worringer in *Abstraction und Einfühlung,* where he deals with the question of style in art. Because such a study must necessarily appeal to a conception of historical fact, this author *psychologizes* the history of art (and *psychologizes* the historical interpretations of artistic phenomena), making an awkward but conscientious declaration of his own point of view. “This is the end result of a deeply ingrained error regarding the essence of art in general. This error has its expression in the belief, sanctioned through many centuries, that the history of art is the history of artistic *capacity*, and that its self-evident and constant goal is the artistic reproduction of natural models. Consequently, artistic progress was seen in the increasing veracity and naturalness of the representation. The question of artistic *will* was never raised because that will seemed to be fixed and indisputable. Capacity alone was the problem in question, never the will. It was believed, then, really, that humanity needed thousands of years to learn to draw with exactness, that is, with natural truth; it was truly believed, that in each moment artistic production was determined by the increase or decrease of this capacity. Passing unnoticed in all of this—even though so close and so necessary for the researcher who wants to understand many situations in the history of art—was the knowledge that this capacity is only a secondary aspect that receives its determination and its norms from the will, the superior and uniquely determining factor. Nevertheless, current research in the sphere of art can no longer, as we have said, make do without this knowledge. For such research the following maxim is axiomatic: We have been able to do everything that we have wanted, and what we haven’t done is because it is not within the direction of artistic will. The will, which used to be indisputable, now becomes itself the focus of research, and capacity is now excluded as the criteria of value.” Translated from *La Esencia del Estilo Gótico,* G. Worringer (Buenos Aires: Revista de Occidente Argentina*,* 1948, pp. 18, 19).

[11] Giovanni Battista Vico, 1668–1744.

[12] This is the subject matter of the first, second, and fourth parts of Vico’s *Principi di scienza nuova d’intorno alla natura delle nazioni, per li quali si ritrovano altri principi del diritto naturale delle genti.*

[13] *The New Science*, Giovanni Battista Vico, third edition, 1744, transl. T. Goddard Bergin and M. Haraold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948, p. 91, par. 342).

[14] *The New Science,* Vico*.*

[15] *La filosofia di G. B. Vico e l’età barocca,* Lorenzo Giusso (Rome: Editrice Perella, 1943).

[16] Johann Gottfried von Herder, 1744–1803.

[17] In reality, this is a “bio-cultural” conception of history, but not in itself less philosophical than any other. As for the designation, Voltaire is among the first to have spoken of the “philosophy of history.”

[18] Auguste Comte, 1798–1857.
[19] *Discours sur l'esprit positif,* A. Comte (Paris: Librairie Schleicher Freres, 1909, par. 73). Note that this is not present in par. 73 of the French edition of the International Positivist Society.
[20] Oswald Spengler, 1880–1936.
[21] *The Decline of the West,* Vol. 1, "Form and Actuality," Oswald Spengler (New York: A. Knopf. 1932, p. 3, Introduction).–
[22] *The Hour of Decision, Part One: Germany and World-Historical Evolution,* Oswald Spengler (New York: Knopf, 1934).
[23] Arnold Toynbee, 1899–1975.
[24] *Hegel's Science of Logic*, G.W.F. Hegel, transl. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Humanities Paperback Library, 1991).
[25] In a note to the Spanish edition of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations,* M. Presas makes the following observations: "The *Fifth Meditation* responds to the objection of transcendental solipsism and can be considered—following the opinion of Ricoeur—as the equivalent of, and substitute for, Descartes's ontology introduced in the *Third Meditation* by means of the idea of the infinite and by the recognition of being in the very presence of this idea. While Descartes relied on God in order to transcend the *cogito*, Husserl transcended the ego by means of the *alter ego*. Hence, just as Descartes had searched for the superior foundation of objectivity in divine truth, Husserl sought it in a philosophy of intersubjectivity." Cf. *Etude sur les Meditations Cartésiennes de Husserl*, P. Ricoeur, *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* (53, 1954, p. 77).

It is with the motive of introducing the reduction that Husserl proposes the problem of intersubjectivity in this way. Five years later, in the lectures entitled *Grundprobleme der Phanomenologie* (given in Gottingen during the winter semester of 1910–11), Husserl extended the reduction to the reduction of intersubjectivity. On various occasions he referred to these lectures (published in volume XIII of *Husserliana*), above all in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. There he gives a short exposition of the investigations, which will later appear in the *Cartesian Meditations*; but he points out that there are many and difficult special investigations to make explicit, which he hopes to publish in the next year. However, as is well known, Husserl did not publish the investigations on specific topics referring to intersubjectivity. *Meditaciones Cartesianas,* E. Husserl (Madrid: Ediciones Paulinas, 1979, p. 150*n*).
[Tr.1] *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology,* E. Husserl, transl. D. Cairns (The Hague, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982, section 44, p. 99).
[26] Abu Muhammed Ali bin Ahmad bin Said Ibn Hazm, 994–1063. From "Cuidado," *Diccionario de Filosofía,* José Ferrater Mora (Madrid: Alianza, 1984).
[Tr.2] *Being and Time,* M. Heidegger, transl. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962, p. 481, H 429).
[27] "The principal thesis of the ordinary way of interpreting time—namely, that time is 'infinite'—makes manifest most impressively the way in which world-time and accordingly temporality in general have been levelled off and covered up by such an interpretation. It is held that time presents itself proximally as an uninterrupted sequence of 'nows.' Every 'now,' moreover, is already a 'just now' or a 'forthwith.' If in characterizing time we stick primarily and exclusively to such a sequence, then in principle neither beginning nor end can be found in it. Every last 'now,' as 'now,' is always already a 'forthwith' that is no longer; thus it is time in the sense of the 'no longer now'—in the sense of the past. Every first 'now' is a 'just-now' that is not yet; thus it is time in the sense of the 'not-yet-now'—in the sense of the 'future.' Hence time is endless 'on both sides.' This thesis becomes possible only on the basis of an orientation towards a free-floating 'in-itself' of a course of 'nows' which is present-at-hand—an orientation in which the full phenomenon of the 'now' has been covered up with regard to its dateability, its worldhood, its spannedness, and its character of having a location of the same kind as Dasein's, so that it has dwindled to an unrecognizable fragment. If one directs one's

glance toward Being-present-at-hand and not-Being-present-at-hand, and thus 'thinks' the sequence on 'nows' through 'to the end,' then an end can never be found. In this way of thinking time through to the end, one must always think more time; from this one infers that time is infinite." *Being and Time.* M. Heidegger (p. 481, H 429).

[Tr.3] *Being and Time,* M. Heidegger (p. 478, Section 81, H 426).

[Tr.4] *Being and Time,* M. Heidegger (p. 381, Section 66, H 332).

[28] This in spite of Husserl's declaration: "…I have nothing to do with Heideggerian wisdom, with that genial lack of scientificity." Cited by Iso Kern, vol. 15 of *Husserliana, XXss*.

[29] So indispensable is the concept of "landscape" that it appears as something obvious in the writings of contemporary physicists. Erwin Schrödinger, an eminent representative of this field, says:

> What is matter? How are we to picture *matter* in our *mind*?
>
> The first form of the question is ludicrous. (How should we say *what* matter *is*—or, if it comes to that, *what electricity is*—both being phenomena given to us once only?) The second form already betrays the whole change of attitude: matter is an image in our mind—mind is thus prior to matter (notwithstanding the strange empirical dependence of my mental processes on the physical data of a certain portion of matter, viz. my brain).
>
> During the second half of the nineteenth century matter seemed to be the permanent thing to which we could cling. *There* was a piece of matter that had never been created (as far as the physicist knew) and could never be destroyed! You could hold on to it and feel that it would not dwindle away under your fingers.
>
> Moreover this matter, the physicist asserted, was with regard to its demeanor, its motion, subject to rigid laws—every bit of it was. It moved according to the forces which neighboring parts of matter, according to their relative situations, exerted on it. You could *foretell* the behavior, it was rigidly determined in all the future by the initial conditions.
>
> This was all quite pleasing, anyhow in physical science, insofar as external inanimate matter comes into play. When applied to the matter that constitutes our own body or the bodies of our friends, or even that of our cat or our dog, a well-known difficulty arises with regard to the apparent freedom of living beings to move their limbs at their own will. We shall enter on this question later.… At the moment I wish to try and explain the radical change in our ideas about matter that has taken place in the course of the last half-century. It came about gradually, inadvertently, without anybody aiming at such a change. We believed we moved still within the old 'materialistic' frame of ideas, when it turned out that we had left it." *Nature and the Greeks* and *Science and Humanism,* E. Schrödinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 115–116).

[30] No natural being, no animal—no matter how great their capacity of work or how social their order or family may be—has produced such profound changes as the human being. Nevertheless, for a long time the evidence of this seems not to have mattered. If today, as a result in part of the technological revolution and the changes brought about in the modes of production, information, and communication, such evidence is recognized, it is clear that many still do this reluctantly, as they cast doubt on these changes by warning of the "dangers" that these advances present for life. In this fashion, the unsustainable view of the passivity of the consciousness has been translated into a consciousness guilty of transgressing against a supposed natural order.

[31] How it is possible that such a conception has passed almost unnoticed by the world of historiology? This is one of the great mysteries, or better still tragedies. Its explanation can be found in the prepredicates of the epoch, which exercise such enormous influence in the cultural environment. In the period of German, French, and Anglo-Saxon ideological supremacy, the works of Ortega y Gasset were associated with a Spain that, in contrast to today, was marching against the flow of the historical process. Making matters worse was the limited and biased exegesis of his prolific output made by some of his commentators. From another angle, he paid dearly for his efforts

to translate the important themes of philosophy into an accessible, almost journalistic language, something that proved unforgivable to the mandarins of academic pedantry of recent decades.

[32] See “Psychology of the Image” in *Contributions to Thought,* Silo. Originally published as “Psicología de la Imagen” in *Contribuciones al Pensamiento* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1991).

Universal Root Myths

Introduction to Universal Root Myths

Since ancient times there has been a powerful desire to define myth, legend, and fable, to separate the apocryphal story and unlikely tale from true description. Enormous effort has gone into demonstrating that myths are the symbolic cloaking of fundamental truths, and, just as forcefully, that myths are the transposition of cosmic forces into beings possessed of intention. It has also been claimed that myths are based on transformations in which vaguely historical characters are elevated to the status of heroes or gods. Much theoretical work has gone into uncovering the objective realities underlying these distortions of reason, as much as into research to discover the profound psychological conflict assumed to be embedded in those projections. All of this labor has turned out to be useful, at least insofar as it has helped us to understand, as if *in vitro,* how new myths struggle to gain space, taking the place of old ones.

It is even possible for scientific theories to become detached from the ambit of science and, though stripped of any proof, gain wide acceptance. When this happens, it is because this theory has become established at the level of social belief. It has acquired the plastic force of the image—a characteristic of paramount importance in allowing it to act as a reference and to orient behavior. And in this new image that bursts onto the scene we can see the avatars of old myths rejuvenated by the changes in the social landscape—a landscape to which people respond according to the demands of the times.

Saying that the system of vital tensions to which a people is subjected is translated as an image is not enough to provide a full explanation unless we are thinking only in simplistic terms of challenge and response. It is necessary to comprehend that in every culture, group, and individual there lives a memory, a historical accumulation on the basis of which the world in which they live is interpreted. This interpretation is what configures for us the landscape that, in perceiving, we take as external. We grasp this landscape according to the vital tensions that correspond to this historical moment or, although they arose long ago, residually form part of our interpretive scheme of present-day reality.

It is only when we discover in a given people their fundamental historical tensions that we come close to an understanding of their ideals, of their apprehensions and hopes. These do not exist within their horizon as cold ideas, but rather as dynamic images that impel behavior in a particular direction. Of course, to the degree that ideas are more closely related to the landscape in question, those ideas will be accepted with greater ease. As much as love or hate, these ideas will be experienced with the full flavor of commitment and truth, their internal register unquestionable for one who lives that experience—even when, objectively, it is not justified.

For example, consider how the fears of certain peoples have been translated into images of a mythical future in which everything will collapse: the gods will fall; the heavens, the rainbow, and all that has been built will collapse; the air will become unbreathable and the waters poisonous; the great tree of the world, responsible for universal equilibrium, will die, and with it the animals and human beings. In critical moments, these peoples have translated their tensions into troubling images of contamination and a world that is being undermined. Yet this is the very thing that has impelled them, in their best moments, to *build* so solidly in so many fields. Other peoples have been formed in the painful register of abandonment and exclusion from lost paradises—and that is the very thing that has propelled them tirelessly to improve and

to learn in the attempt to reach the center of knowledge. There are peoples who seem marked by the guilt of having killed their gods, and others who feel affected by a multifaceted and changing vision. This has led one to seek redemption through action, and the other to a reflective search for a permanent and transcendental truth.

Certainly these fragmentary observations do not explain the extraordinary richness of human behavior, and in proposing them we do not wish to propagate stereotypes. We simply want to broaden the vision that is normally held of myths and the psychosocial function that they serve.

Today the isolation of cultures is disappearing, and with it their mythic heritage. Profound changes can be observed in the members of all communities of the Earth under the impact not only of information and technology but also of social usage, customs, values, images, and behaviors that reach them from all over the planet. This displacement will not diminish the proposals for solutions that find expression in more or less scientific theories or formulations, nor will it lessen the anguish or the hope—all of which still carry at their core ancient myths unknown to the citizens of today's world.

For us, approaching the great myths has meant once again revaluing all peoples, but from the optic of trying to comprehend their basic beliefs. In this work we have not touched upon the beautiful stories and legends that describe the deeds of the demigods and extraordinary mortals. Instead, we have circumscribed our work, limiting it to the myths in which the nucleus is occupied by the gods, even when humankind may play an important role in the plot. Moreover, as far as possible we have not dealt with questions of particular religious cults, considering that practical and daily religion should not be confused with the plastic images of poetic mythology.

In this work we have tried to take as our reference the original texts of each mythos, an approach that has left us facing a number of problems. For example, we might note how the mythological richness of the Cretan and Mycenaean civilizations has been subsumed in one generic chapter—Greco-Roman myths—precisely because we did not have access to the original texts of those other cultures. The same occurred with the myths of Africa, Oceania, and, to some degree, the Americas. In any case, the continuing advances of anthropologists and specialists in comparative mythology encourage us to consider a future work based on developments in these fields.

The title of this work, *Universal Root Myths,* demands some clarification. We have considered as a "root" myth every myth that, in passing from people to people, has preserved in its central argument a certain timelessness. That is, it has a core that has been maintained, even when over time changes have occurred in the names and attributes of the characters and even the landscape in which the action takes place. While the central plotline, which we also call the "nucleus of ideation," also undergoes changes, it does so at a pace that is relatively slow in relation to what may be thought of as secondary elements.

So it is that, just as we have not concerned ourselves with the variations in the secondary system of representation, neither have we attempted to determine the precise moment at which the myth arose. It is not viable to proceed otherwise, because clearly the origin of a given myth cannot be traced to one particular moment.

In any event, it is the documents and other vestiges of history that give evidence of the existence of a myth, at least those that fall within a certain historical range. By the same token, the construction of a myth is not something that appears to belong to any single author, but rather belongs to successive generations of authors and commentators who rely on material that is itself unstable and dynamic. Discoveries in archeology, anthropology, and philology that

support comparative mythology demonstrate how certain myths that had been considered original to a particular culture may often turn out to pertain to earlier cultures, or to contemporary cultures that influenced them.

For this reason we have not focused on arranging the myths in chronological order, but have instead arranged them according to the importance they seem to have acquired for a particular culture, even when this culture may have come after another in which the same nucleus of ideation was already acting.

It should also be noted that the present work is in no way an attempt to be a comprehensive compilation or comparison, or to reflect a classification based on predetermined categories. Rather, our interest has been to put into evidence the enduring nuclei of ideation that have been active in different latitudes and historical moments. To this one could object that the transformation of cultural context must cause a myth's core expressions and meanings to vary as well. And it is precisely for this reason that we have dealt here with myths that have gained a greater importance in a particular culture and moment, even when they have existed in other cultures, but without fulfilling a significant psychosocial function.

As for those myths that occur in apparently disconnected geographic points, yet display important similarities, only by thorough investigation can it be determined whether in fact such a historical disconnection really existed. In this field, research is advancing rapidly, and today it can no longer be claimed, for example, that the cultures of the Americas are totally alien to those of Asia. It could be said that the Bering Strait migrations occurred at a time, more than 20,000 years ago, before the peoples of Asia had yet developed myths, and that these took shape only after the tribes had settled. But even if that is the case, certainly the pre-mythic situation was similar for both these peoples, and perhaps in this situation models can be found that contain some common patterns, even if they developed unequally in their respective cultural contexts. Whatever the case may be, this is a discussion that is far from finished, and it would be premature to adopt any of the hypotheses that can be found in contention today. As for what concerns us here, the originality of the myth is of little consequence—what is central, as previously mentioned, is the importance that the myth has in a given culture.

This is the rapture of those beings not understood in their deepest nature, great powers who made all that is known and even all that which is still unknown.

This is the rhapsody of the external nature of the gods, of action seen and sung by human beings who could place themselves in the watchtower of the sacred.

This is what appeared as a sign fixed in eternal time, capable of disrupting the laws and order, and feeble reason. That which mortals desired, this the gods made—that which the gods spoke through human beings.

I. Sumerian-Akkadian Myths

Gilgamesh

(The Poem of Lord Kullab)

Gilgamesh and the Creation of His Double

He who knew all and who understood the root of things. He who saw everything and learned everything. He who knew the countries of the world—great was Gilgamesh!

He who built the walls of Uruk. He who undertook a long voyage and who knew all that occurred before the flood. Upon returning, he recorded his feats on a great stele. Because the great gods created him, two-thirds of his body was divine and one-third human.

When he had battled against every country, he returned to Uruk, his homeland. But the people murmured with hate because Gilgamesh claimed the flower of youth for his exploits and ruled with an iron fist. So the people took their complaints to the gods, and the gods took them to Anu. Anu carried them to Aruru, and said these words:[1]

"You, Aruru, who created humanity, create now a copy of Gilgamesh, so that when these two meet they will fight between themselves and leave our city in peace." The goddess Aruru, hearing this request, concentrated within herself, moistened her hands, and, taking some clay, formed the valiant Enkidu. The hero was born with his body covered with hair as thick as the barley of the fields.[2] He knew nothing of men or their countries; his mind was closed. Like a wild beast he lived on the plants of the field and drank at the watering holes with the herds.

In time, a hunter came upon Enkidu, and his face contorted in fear. He went to his father and told him of the prowess of this wild man. And so the old man sent his son to Uruk to beseech Gilgamesh for help.

When Gilgamesh heard the story from the lips of the hunter he recommended that he take a beautiful temple-girl with him, a daughter of pleasure, and leave her within reach of the intruder. "In that way, when he sees the young woman, he will be taken with her and he will forget his animals, and his animals will not recognize him." So the king spoke, and so the hunter did. After three days he arrived at the meeting place, and there he waited. One day and then a second passed, until the animals came to the spring to drink. Among them was the intruder, and the intruder saw the temple-girl reclining there. And when she stood up and approached him, Enkidu was trapped by her beauty. Seven days he spent with her, until he decided to return to his beasts—but the gazelles and the herds of the desert fled from him. Enkidu had lost his strength and could not run, but his intelligence opened and he began to think and feel as a man does.

He sat down again beside the woman and she said to him: "Why do you live among the animals like a wild thing? Come, I will take you to Uruk, to the sanctuary of Anu and the goddess Ishtar, to Gilgamesh whom no one can defeat." This pleased Enkidu because his heart yearned for a friend, and so he let the young woman lead him to the fertile fields, to the place of stables and shepherds.

Suckled on the milk of animals, he knew neither bread nor wine until the girl gave them to him. The sacred slave anointed him with oil, a barber shaved his body, and he was dressed like a young king. Taking up his lance to fight the wild animals, he freed the shepherds from their fears, allowing them to sleep undisturbed. It happened, then, that an emissary arrived, requesting Enkidu's help in ending the injustices of Gilgamesh, king of Uruk. Filled with fury, Enkidu promised to change the order of things.

But Gilgamesh had seen the savage in his dreams, and comprehended that it was through combat that they would come to understand each other. So it was that when his opponent blocked his path, Gilgamesh rushed upon him with the force of a charging bull. The people gathered round, watching the ferocious battle and praising Enkidu, who so resembled the king. Before the house of the Assembly they fought. They shattered the doors into splinters, they demolished the walls. But when the king managed to throw Enkidu to the ground, Enkidu was appeased, and began to praise Gilgamesh. So the two embraced, and their friendship was sealed.

The Cedar Forest

Gilgamesh had a dream, and Enkidu said: "Here is the meaning of your dream: It is your fate to be king, but not to be immortal. So deal justly with your servants, deal justly before the eyes of the god Shamash. Use your power to liberate and not to oppress." Gilgamesh thought about his life and realized that he had not fulfilled his destiny. So he said to Enkidu: "I should go to the country of Life where the cedars grow and inscribe my name there on a stele where is written the names of those who are worthy of glory."

Enkidu was saddened, because as a child of the mountain he knew the roads that led to the cedar forest. He thought: "It is ten thousand leagues in any direction from the gates of the forest to its center. In the heart of the forest lives Humbaba (whose name means 'Enormity'). His breath is fire, and when he roars it is like a tempest." But Gilgamesh had already made up his mind to go to the forest to end the evil of the world, the evil of Humbaba. And because Gilgamesh was decided, Enkidu prepared to guide him, but not before first explaining the dangers. "A great warrior who never sleeps guards the entrance," said Enkidu. "Only the gods are immortal, and man cannot achieve immortality—he cannot battle against Humbaba."

Gilgamesh commended himself to Shamash, the sun-god, asking him for help in his undertaking. And Gilgamesh remembered all the bodies of the men he had seen floating in the river as he gazed down from the walls of Uruk—the bodies of enemies and friends, of acquaintances and strangers. And so he thought upon his own end and, taking two goats to the temple, a white one with no marks and a brown one, he said to Shamash:

"Without hope, a man dies, and I have my task to accomplish. It is a long road to the closed realm of Humbaba. Why, Shamash, did you fill my heart with the hope of this undertaking if it could not be realized?" And Shamash the compassionate accepted Gilgamesh's offerings and his tears, and celebrated a solemn pact with him.

Then Gilgamesh and Enkidu gave orders to the artisans to forge their weapons, and the masters brought javelins, swords, bows, and axes. The weapons of each one weighed ten times thirty shekels, and the armor another ninety. Then the heroes set out, and in one day they walked fifty leagues. In three days they covered as much terrain as travelers do in a month and three weeks. Even before they reached the gates of the forest they had to cross seven mountains. At the end of the journey they came to the gates—they were seventy cubits high and

forty-two wide. So beautiful, so dazzling was this entrance that they did not destroy it. Instead, Enkidu rushed upon it, pushing with only his bare hands until it opened wide. Then they descended until they reached the foot of the green-covered mountain.

Awestruck, they stood motionless, contemplating the mountain of cedars, the verdant slopes where the mansion of the gods stood. Forty hours they spent in ecstasy, gazing upon the forest and the magnificent path that Humbaba traveled to reach his dwelling.

Before nightfall, Gilgamesh dug a well and scattered fine meal, asking the mountain for auspicious dreams. Squatting down, his head on his knees, Gilgamesh dreamed, and Enkidu interpreted the auspicious dreams. The following night Gilgamesh asked that Enkidu in turn might have auspicious dreams, but the dreams the mountain delivered were ominous. Then Gilgamesh did not awake, and with effort Enkidu managed to raise him to his feet. Mounting their horses, they rode across the terrain, wearing their armor as if it were the lightest of garments. They reached the immense cedar, and Gilgamesh, seizing an axe in his hands, felled the great tree.

Humbaba left his mansion and cast the eye of death upon Gilgamesh. But the sun-god Shamash raised terrible hurricanes against Humbaba—the cyclone and the whirlwind. Eight tempests he hurled against Humbaba, so that he could neither advance nor retreat, while Gilgamesh and Enkidu cut the cedars to enter his dominion. And so Humbaba, now meek and fearful, presented himself before the heroes, promising them great honors. Gilgamesh put aside his weapons and was about to assent when Enkidu interrupted: “Do not listen to him! No, my friend, evil speaks through his mouth. He must die by our hands!” And thanks to the warning of his friend, Gilgamesh recovered. Taking up the axe and unsheathing his sword, he wounded Humbaba in the neck. Enkidu also fell upon Humbaba and struck the second blow. On the third blow Humbaba fell over, silent and dead. And so they took his head from his body.

At that moment chaos was unleashed, for he who lay dead was the Guardian of the Cedar Forest. And so Enkidu felled the trees of the forest—all the way to the banks of the Euphrates he pulled them up by their roots.

Then, removing the head from a shroud, they showed it to the gods. But when Enlil, god of the storms, saw the lifeless body of Humbaba, he was filled with rage, and he took from these profaners the power and the glory that had been Humbaba’s and gave them to the lion, the barbarian, and the desert. Then the two friends left the forest of cedars.

Gilgamesh washed his body, casting his bloodied clothes far away and even burning those that were unstained. The royal crown shone upon his head, and the goddess Ishtar looked upon him with desire. But Gilgamesh spurned her because she had lost all of her husbands, and had, through love, reduced them to the most abject servitude. And so Gilgamesh said: “You are a ruin that offers no shelter from the storm, you are the palace jewels that have been plundered by thieves, you are the poison hidden in the meal. You are a foundation made of soft stone, you are an amulet incapable of warding off danger, you are a sandal that trips its owner in the midst of the race.”

The Celestial Bull, the Death of Enkidu and the Descent to the Hells

Furious, the princess Ishtar went to her father, Anu, and threatened to break open the doors of Hell and unleash an army of the dead more numerous than that of the living. She cried: “If you do not set the Celestial Bull upon Gilgamesh, I will do so.” And in exchange for seven years

of fertile fields, Anu agreed. At once he created the Celestial Bull, which fell to Earth. In the first attack the beast killed three hundred men. In the second, hundreds more fell. In the third it charged Enkidu but, grasping the horns and leaping astride it, he knocked the Celestial Bull to the ground.

While the beast spewed bloody foam from its mouth, Enkidu managed to hold on and, almost fainting from the struggle, cried out: “Gilgamesh, we have promised the gods that we will leave enduring names—sink your sword into the body of our enemy!” Then Gilgamesh attacked and killed the Celestial Bull, driving his sharp sword between the horns and nape of its neck. Immediately, the friends removed the still-beating heart and offered it up to Shamash. But from the highest wall of Uruk, the goddess Ishtar put a curse on Gilgamesh. Hearing the princess, Enkidu could not control his fury, and sealed his fate by ripping out the genitals of the Celestial Bull and hurling them at the divine face.

When the new day arrived, Enkidu awoke from a dream that had troubled his sleep. In this dream the gods Anu, Enlil, Shamash, and Ea held council together. The gods argued about the death of Humbaba and the Celestial Bull, and in the end they decreed that of the two friends, it was Enkidu who must die. After the dream, he awoke and recounted what he had seen. He went back to dreaming, and this is what he related:

“The musical instruments of Gilgamesh fell into a great pit. Gilgamesh searched for them, but could not reach the depths where they had fallen. With his hands he sought the harp and the flute; with his feet he tried to reach them. Seated before the entrance to the subterranean worlds, Gilgamesh cried bitterly, pleading for someone to return the instruments from the depths of the hells. Then Enkidu said: ‘I will go down and seek your flute.’ At once the pit leading to the hells opened, and Enkidu descended. Time passed, and a saddened Gilgamesh implored: ‘Let Enkidu return and speak with me!’ The spirit of Enkidu flew from the depths like an arrow, and the two brothers spoke: ‘You who know the subterranean world, tell me: Have you seen those who died in the fury of battle and those who died abandoned in the fields?’ Enkidu answered: ‘Those who have died in battle are sustained by their parents, but those whose bodies are abandoned in the fields find no peace in the underworld. I have also seen those who wander, whose spirit is not remembered—they are always restless, prowling around and feeding on the refuse that people have left behind.’ Then the two brothers fell silent.[3]

Enkidu fell ill and died. Then Gilgamesh said: “To suffer and die—life has no other meaning! Will I also die like Enkidu? I must seek Utnapishtim, he whom they call ‘The Distant,’ so that he may explain how he came to be immortal. First I will play my lute, and then I will dress in the skin of a lion, and, invoking Sin, I will go on my way.”

Gilgamesh walked all the roads until he arrived at the mountains, at the very gateway of the Sun. There he stopped before the scorpion-men, the terrible guardians of the gateway of the Sun. Asking to speak to Utnapishtim, he said: “I wish to question him about death and about life.” But the scorpion-men tried to dissuade him from his enterprise. They said: “None who enter the mountain ever return to the light of day.” Still, Gilgamesh persisted in his request that they open the door of the mountain, until finally it was done. He walked in utter darkness for many hours, until at last he saw in the distance a light dawning. Upon reaching it, he found himself standing before the Sun. Though almost blinded by its splendor, he could still make out a vast garden. He took the paths that the gods travel until finally he came upon a tree with branches of lapis lazuli, and from the branches hung fruit of rubies.

Dressed in the skin of a lion and eating the flesh of animals, Gilgamesh wandered through the garden, not knowing which way to turn. And when Shamash saw Gilgamesh he took pity on

him and said: “When the gods made man, they reserved immortality for themselves. The life that you are searching for, you will never find.”[4] But Gilgamesh followed the path until he reached the shore, where he encountered the ferryman of The Distant. They sailed on until they saw land—but Utnapishtim, seeing them arrive, met them and asked for explanations from the one who accompanied his ferryman. Gilgamesh gave his name and explained the meaning of the crossing.

The Universal Flood

Utnapishtim said: “I will tell you a great secret. Once, on the banks of the Euphrates stood an ancient city, sovereign and wealthy, called Shurrupak. The people multiplied and everything could be found in abundance. But Enlil, disturbed by the endless clamor, called to the other gods, saying that it was no longer possible to sleep, and demanding that a great flood be unleashed to put an end to such excess. Then in a dream Ea revealed Enlil’s plan to me. ‘Tear down your house and save your life—build a covered boat, it must be of equal length and width. Onto the vessel you will take the seed of every living thing. If others ask about your labors, tell them that you have decided to go live in the gulf.’ My younger children brought pitch and the older ones everything else that was needed.

“I built the deck of the vessel, and below the upper deck I built seven decks, dividing each into nine parts. Finally, I rolled the heavy construction over thick logs until it entered the water, floating with two-thirds submerged. On the seventh day, the vessel was completed and loaded with all that was needed. My family, relatives, and artisans boarded the vessel, and later were loaded the animals, both domestic and wild. When that evening the hour came, Enlil sent the Rider on the Storm.

“Boarding the vessel, I sealed it with pitch and tar and, as everything was in readiness, I gave the tiller to Puzur-Amurri, the helmsman. Then Nergal loosed the floodgates of the waters below, and in a thundering torrent the gods razed fields and mountains. The judges of the hells, the Annunaki, cast away their torches, and day was made night. Day after day the tempest grew worse, and seemed to gather fury as it went. On the seventh day the flood stopped and the sea grew calm. As I opened the hatchway, the light of the sun fell full on my face. But I searched in vain—all was sea. I cried for the men and the living beings newly turned to clay.

“At last the vessel came to rest on the summit of Mount Nisir. I loosed a dove and a swallow, and finding no resting place on the Earth, they returned. After many days I freed a crow, which, cawing, did not return. Later the gods met in council and reproached Enlil for having meted out so heavy a punishment on the creatures of the Earth. And so Enlil came to our vessel, and, making my wife and me kneel, he touched our foreheads as he said: ‘You were mortal, but now you and your wife shall live forever, here at the mouth of the rivers, and you shall be known as The Distant. As for you, Gilgamesh, why should the gods grant you immortality?’”

The Return

Utnapishtim set a test for Gilgamesh. For six days and seven nights he was to go without sleep. But as soon as the hero lay back, the mist of sleep like soft wool fell upon him. “Look at him—look at the one who seeks immortality!” said The Distant to his wife. Awakening, Gilgamesh complained bitterly about his failure: “Where will I go? For death lies on all roads.” Disappointed, Utnapishtim ordered the ferryman to return the man. But he was not without pity,

for he decreed that the clothing Gilgamesh wore would never become old, so that once he was back in his own country the garments would shine resplendently for mortal eyes.

As he was leaving, The Distant whispered: “At the bottom of the waters is a thorny plant that can wound your hands, but if you are able to take hold of it and keep it with you, you will be immortal!”

Gilgamesh tied heavy rocks to his legs and plunged into the water. He grasped the plant, and while returning to the surface said to himself: “With this I will give my people to eat and I will also regain my youth.” Then he walked hour after hour in the darkness of the mountain until he again passed through the gateway to the world. He saw a fountain, and after all his labors he began to bathe—but a serpent coming from the depths of the pool snatched the plant away, and submerged once again beyond the reach of Gilgamesh.

And so the mortal returned with empty hands and an empty heart. Thus it was that he returned to strong-walled Uruk. And so the decree of the gods was fulfilled. With the bread of tribute for the Guardian of the Gateway, with the bread we asked of the serpent-god, Lord of the Tree of Life—with this bread we give thanks to Dumuzi the shepherd, who makes the Earth fertile![5]

He who knew all and who understood the root of things. He who saw everything and learned everything. He who knew the countries of the world—great was Gilgamesh!

He who built the walls of Uruk. He who undertook a long voyage and who knew all that occurred before the flood. Upon returning, he recorded his feats on a great stele.

II. Assyro-Babylonian Myths

Enuma Elish (*Poem of Creation*)[1]

The Original Chaos

When neither the heavens above nor the Earth below had yet been named, from the Abyss and Impetuosity the waters mingled. Neither gods nor marshes nor rushes existed. In that chaos, two serpents were begotten that for a long time grew in size, making room for the horizon of the sea and the Earth. They divided the spaces, forming the limits of the heavens and the Earth. The great gods were born from those limits and were grouped together in different parts of what was the world. And these divinities continued to multiply, and in this way disturbed the great ones who shaped the original chaos.

So Apsu of the abyss went to his wife, Tiamat, mother of the oceanic waters, and said: “I cannot abide the goings-on of the gods. Their revelry will not let me sleep; they stir things up by themselves, since we have not established any destiny.”

The Gods and Marduk

Thus spoke Apsu to Tiamat the resplendent. He spoke in such a way that Tiamat, furious, began to shout: “We shall destroy those rebellious ones, and then at last we will be able to sleep.” So she screamed as she shook with rage. And so it was that one of the gods, Ea, came to know of their destructive designs, and he laid a spell upon the waters. With that, Apsu (as was his wish) fell into a deep sleep, and was enchained. Finally Ea killed him, tore apart his body, and built his dwelling upon it. There he lived with his wife Damkina, and from their union was born Marduk.

Ea’s heart was exalted upon seeing the perfection of his son, completed by his twin heads divine. The child’s fiery voice rang out, his four eyes seeing all and his four ears hearing all. His enormous body and his incomprehensible limbs were bathed in a radiance that was strongest when the lightning swirled around him.

The War of the Gods

While Marduk grew and gave order to the world, some of the gods approached Tiamat and made recriminations about her lack of valor, saying: “They killed your consort and you did nothing, and now we also can find no rest. Become our avenging force and we will march at your side and we will go into battle.” In this way they grumbled and gathered around Tiamat, until after long consideration she resolved to make arms for her gods. In her fury she created serpent-monsters with poisonous claws, storm-monsters, scorpion-men, demon-lions, centaurs, and flying dragons. Eleven invincible monsters Tiamat created, and then from among her gods she elevated Kingu and made him chief of her army.[2]

She entrusted Kingu with command over her troops and their arms and raised him to a seat in the assembly: “I have cast a spell in your favor, giving you power to command the gods. You

are now my spouse, and the Anunnaki shall exalt your name. I give you now the tablets of Fate and I fasten them around your neck. Nothing will change in this mandate, and your word shall prevail."[3]

Ea, upon discovering their perverse designs, again sought help from the other gods, proclaiming: "Tiamat, who begat us, now abhors us. She has gathered the terrible Anunnaki around her and set them against us. She has pitted one-half of the gods against the other. How can we make her desist? I ask that the Igigi gather in council to resolve this." And so the many generations of the Igigi gathered together, but none among them could resolve the matter. When, after a time, neither emissaries nor valiant heroes could change Tiamat's designs, Anshar the elder stood up and called for Marduk. And so Ea went to his son and requested that he aid the gods. But Marduk answered that if he did as they asked he must be made chief among them. Thus spoke Marduk, and he went before the council.

The gods filled their bellies with sweet wine and ceremonial bread. Impassioned, they began to shout for Marduk. They decreed his fate, naming him their avenger. With rites and incantations they erected a throne and sat him upon it, making him preside over them. They placed a garment before Marduk and said: "Whether to create or destroy, your word will be supreme. You have but to open your mouth and it shall be done." Before the eyes of the assembly Marduk spoke, and the garment vanished. Again he spoke some words, and the radiant garment reappeared. Having tested his power, the gods said: "You are king. Take the scepter and the palu, take up the incomparable weapon and destroy our enemies with it. Take the blood of Tiamat and spill it in hidden places."[4]

The Lord made a bow and hung it with his quiver at his side. He made a net to trap Tiamat. He raised the mace and placed the lightning bolt before him, and his body was filled with flames. Then he set the winds so that not even the least piece of Tiamat could escape, and, raising the hurricane and torrential storms, he mounted the storm-chariot. He yoked his chariot to the four horses of terrible names, and like a lightning bolt flew straight to Tiamat. In her hand she held a plant that gave forth poison, but the Lord drew near so as to search within her and perceive the intentions of the Anunnaki and of Kingu.[5]

"Is it because you think yourself so important that you elevate yourself above me like the supreme god?" roared Tiamat, furious.

"It is you who have elevated yourself so high and you who have elevated Kingu and given him rank that is not his by right—you who hate your children and wish evil upon them. Stand up now and let us meet in combat!" So responded Marduk, while the gods sharpened their weapons.

Tiamat conjured and recited her spells, and the gods went forth into battle. Then the Lord threw his net, and the terrible Tiamat opened her enormous mouth. At that moment, he unleashed the hurricanes that penetrated into her, and he released the arrow that pierced her belly. Then he took her dark entrails, leaving her without life. The horrible army disbanded, and in the confusion the sharp weapons were destroyed. Caught fast in the net, the prisoners were cast down into subterranean cells. The Tablets of Destiny, to which the arrogant Kingu held no rightful claim, Marduk stripped from him, and Kingu was imprisoned with the Anunnaki. In this way the eleven creatures that Tiamat had created were transformed into statues so that the triumph of Marduk would never be forgotten.

The Creation of the World

Reinforcing the prison that held his enemies, Marduk took the Tablets of Destiny, and marking them with his seal he placed them upon his chest. Then the Lord turned again to the body of Tiamat, and with his merciless mace he crushed her skull. He divided the channels of her blood so that the hurricane might carry it to secret places. Seeing the monstrous flesh, he conceived artistic thoughts. He cut her cadaver lengthwise as if it were a fish, raising one of its pieces up to the sky. He placed it under lock and key with a guard over it to prevent the waters it held from escaping. Then, crossing through the spaces, he inspected the regions thereof, and, measuring the abyss, he established his dwelling upon it. In this way Marduk created the heavens and the Earth and established their limits. And then he built dwellings for the gods, and lit them with stars.

He created the Year, and set the figures that designated its twelve months.[6] These he divided into the days. On the left side and on the right side he strengthened the bolts, placing the zenith between them. He gave Shamash[7] the job of dividing the day and the night, and set the brilliant star of his bow[8] for all to see. Nebiru[9] he charged with dividing the celestial sections into north and south. He entrusted Sin to illuminate the darkness, giving order to the days and the nights. Thus spoke the Lord: “Each and every month you must take up your crown. For six days you will wear the horns, and on the seventh the half-crown. After fourteen days, when Shamash reaches you on the horizon, you will diminish the crown, reducing its light. In this way you will keep approaching and moving away from the sun, but the twenty-ninth day will once again place him in opposition.”[10]

Later, turning again to Tiamat, Marduk took her saliva, and with it formed the clouds. With her head he created the hills and with her eyes he made the Tigris and the Euphrates flow. Finally, from her paps he created the great mountains and dug deep holes so that the wells might give water. Finally, Marduk made the ground solid, raising a luxurious dwelling and a temple, offering them to the gods so that they might lodge there when they gathered in the assemblies in which they set the destinies of the world. Then he said that these buildings should be called Babylon, meaning “the dwelling of the great gods.”[11]

The Creation of the Human Being

Upon finishing his work, the Lord was exalted by the gods, and in acknowledgment he said to them: “Although all the gods are to be revered equally, I will divide them into two groups so that they may govern the upper and lower regions.[12] With my blood I will knead and form man so that he will keep alive our worship and cult. In this way shall the gods be satisfied.” But impartial Ea responded: “Let only one of the two siblings perish in order to give his blood to humanity. The assembly of gods must decide who is responsible for all these misfortunes.”[13]

Marduk had the captive Anunnaki brought forth, and asked them under oath who was responsible for the insurrection, promising life to whoever told the truth. And so the gods accused Kingu. Immediately, they brought forth the prisoner. Reproaching him, they bound him and proceeded to take his blood, from which they would form mankind. Ea had them set free all the other captive gods, and imposed service and devotion to the gods on humanity. It was an incomprehensible act.[14] And in this way the Lord freed the gods and divided them—three hundred above and three hundred below—making them the guardians of the world. Grateful,

the Anunnaki built a sanctuary and raised the apex of the Esagila. Then they erected a stepped tower, and within it they established a new dwelling for Marduk.[15]

When the assembly of the great gods had gathered, they praised Marduk, and bowing to the ground they spoke an incantation that put the life of humanity in peril. They swore by water and oil to make dangerous the life of man.[16] Then they said: “Let the ‘black heads’ expect salvation from us, for though Marduk can be called by fifty names, he is the Lord.”[17]

And the stars shone and all the beings created by the gods were filled with joy. Humanity also recognized itself in the Lord. For that, let there be a remembering of all that occurred. May the children learn this teaching from their parents. May the wise study the meaning of the Song of Marduk, who vanquished Tiamat and achieved kingship.[18]

III. Egyptian Myths

Ptah and Creation[1]

There was only an endless sea, lifeless and absolutely silent. Then Ptah arrived with the forms of the abyss—depths and distances, solitudes and forces. Through them Ptah saw and heard, smelled and perceived, existence in his heart. But what he perceived, he had previously thought within himself. In this way he took the form of Atum, and, devouring his own seed, gave birth to wind and moisture, which he expelled from his mouth, creating Nut, the sky, and Geb, the Earth. Atum, the nonexistent, was a manifestation of Ptah. And so, the nine fundamental forms and the universe with all the beings were inexistent before he conceived them within himself and brought them into being with a single word. After having created everything from his mouth, he rested.

So it is that until the end of time you will be invoked thus: “Immense being, creator of worlds. You who call to life those who are unborn but who are within you. You who call to life those who have died but are within you.”[2]

All the forms of the gods are but forms of Ptah, and is it only because of their own limitations that humans adore him under many names. His names change and are forgotten; new gods follow the old ones, but beyond all of this Ptah remains. He created the heavens as a guide, he surrounded the Earth with the sea. To pacify the dead he created Tartarus. He fixed Ra’s course through the skies from horizon to horizon, and set it so that man would have his time and his dominion. He did the same for each pharaoh and each kingdom.

Ra, on his way through the skies, reshaped what had been established and calmed the discontented gods. He loved creation and gave love to the animals so that they would be happy battling against the chaos that imperiled their lives. He determined the seasons and set limits to the night and to the day. He gave the Nile a rhythm, making it flood the land and then recede, so that all might live from the fruit of its waters. He vanquished the forces of darkness, and, being the one who brought the light, he was called Amon-Ra by those who believed that Amon was born from an egg that, breaking with a flash, gave rise to the stars and other celestial lights.

But the genealogy of the gods begins with Atum, who is the father-mother of the gods. Atum begat Shu, the wind, and Tefnut, moisture; and from these, Nut, the sky, and Geb, the Earth, were born. These brothers united and begat Osiris, Seth, Neftis, and Isis. This is the divine Ennead from which everything derives.

The Death and Resurrection of Osiris

The parents of Osiris saw that he was strong and kind, and so they entrusted him with governing the fertile territories and caring for the life of the plants, the animals, and human beings. To his brother, Seth, they gave the vast desert and foreign lands. Everything wild and strong—the herds and wild beasts—was under his care.

Osiris and Isis together were resplendent lovers. But the fog of envy disturbed Seth, and having devised a plot to kill his brother, with the help of seventy-two members of his retinue he invited everyone to a feast. That night, Osiris and the conspirators arrived. Seth displayed a magnificent sarcophagus, promising to give it to the one whom it fit best. And so the guests

each tried out the sarcophagus, until it was Osiris's turn. As soon as he had entered it they quickly lowered the lid and nailed it shut. Having trapped Osiris, they took him to the Nile and threw him into its waters, intending that he should sink into its depths. But instead, the sarcophagus floated, drifting downstream away from Egypt until it reached the sea.

A long time then passed, until one day the coffin reached Phoenicia,[3] where the waves deposited it at the foot of a tree. The tree grew to an enormous height, enveloping the sarcophagus in its trunk. The king of this place, admiring the incredible specimen, called for the tree to be felled and the great trunk brought to his palace, where it might serve as a central column. Meanwhile, Isis had a revelation of what had happened, and so she traveled to Phoenicia. There, she entered the service of the queen so that she might be near the body of her husband. But the queen, realizing that her servant was in reality Isis, gave her the trunk to do with as she wished. Isis, splitting open the wooden covering, pulled the coffin out, and returned to Egypt bearing her cargo. By this time, however, Seth was aware of what had happened, and, fearing that Isis would revive her husband, he stole the body. Quickly Seth set himself to cutting the body into fourteen parts, and scattered them far and wide. But upon hearing what had occurred, Isis undertook a pilgrimage to recover the pieces of the cadaver.

Following the death of Osiris, darkness reigned for a long time. No one took care of the animals, the plants, or the human beings. Endless strife and death replaced harmony.

When Isis had recovered the different parts of the body, she bound them tightly together with bandages and began her incantations.[4] She then built an enormous furnace, a sacred pyramid,[5] and placed the mummy in its depths. Drawing the mummy to her, she breathed into it as a potter does, to increase the heat of the fire of life.

Osiris awoke, knew the mortal dream, and wished to keep his green face of the plant world.[6] He wished to keep the white crown and his plumage in order to remember clearly which lands of the Nile were his.[7] He also took the whip and the crook to separate and reconcile, as shepherds do with their curved staff.[8] Standing erect, Osiris saw death around him, and so he left his double, his Ka,[9] entrusting it with the care of his own body so that no one would again desecrate it. He took the cross of life, the Ankh[10] of the resurrection, and with it in his Ba[11] he went to save and protect all those who, alone and terrified, enter Amenti.[12] For them he went to live in the west, awaiting the helpless exiles from the kingdom of life. Thanks to his sacrifice, nature always flowers again, and human beings, created by the divine potter,[13] are more than just animated clay. From this time forth, god is invoked in many ways. From this time forth, the last breath is a song of hope:

"Good Osiris! Send Thoth[14] so that he may guide us to the sacred sycamore,[15] to the Tree of Life, to the door of the Lady of the West;[16] let him lead us away from the fourteen mansions surrounded by stupor and anguish, where the perverse suffer terrible punishments. Send Thoth, the wise ibis, the infallible scribe of human deeds recorded on the papyrus of indelible memory. Good Osiris! In you the victorious awaits his resurrection, after the judgment in which his actions are weighed by Anubis, the just jackal.[17] Good Osiris! Let our Ba board the celestial ship, separated from the Ka, and let the Ka remain as custodian of the amulets[18] in our tomb. And then we shall sail toward the splendorous regions of the new day."

Horus the Divine Avenger[19]

After Isis helped resurrect Osiris, she gave birth to their son. Taking the newborn, she hid him in the reedbeds of the Nile to protect him from the fury of Seth, Min,[20] and the attackers from

the desert. He was the radiant child in the lotus flower who was revered as a falcon, with his eyes on every corner of the Earth. As Horus Harendotes, he would be the avenger of his father when the time came. He is Horus, god of all the lands, son of love and of resurrection.

The child grew and his mother prepared him to reclaim the territories that Seth had usurped in venturing to the land of the Nile, when he had a right only to the deserts and foreign lands. When Osiris made his journey to the West, to the lands of Amenti over which he now reigned, he left Isis with the mandate to regain all of the Nile for his son. And so the adversaries met before the assembly of the Ennead. Horus declared: “A despicable fratricide, relying on blind force unconsecrated by the gods, usurped the rights bequeathed to me by my father…” But his speech was cut short by Seth’s irate cries, scorning the request as that of a child incapable of exercising such demands. And so, drawing their weapons, they fought in single combat—one against the other they rolled over mountains and shook the waters from their riverbeds. The dispute lasted eighty long years, until Seth tore out Horus’s eyes and Horus crushed the vital organs of Seth. The great fury only came to an end when they both fainted and fell to the ground. Thoth then healed their wounds and reestablished the fragile peace that the neglected world demanded.

They stood before the gods and sought a verdict. Ra, who had always been steadfastly aided by Seth in his struggle against the deadly Apophis,[21] tipped the balance against Horus. But Isis bravely defended her son. In the end, the gods restored the child’s rights, but Ra stormed out of the assembly, muttering angrily. And thus the gods were divided in number and power, and there was no end in sight for the dispute. Then Isis, using her wiles, caused Seth to give a speech in which he undermined his own claim to the throne, and through that error Seth was removed from the lands to which he had laid claim. Ra, however, demanded a new trial in which all these issues could finally be decided.

Each one now transformed into a mighty hippopotamus and began to fight anew. From the water’s edge, Isis loosed a harpoon that by mistake hit Horus, who, crying out and throwing himself upon his mother, tore off her head.[22] As a replacement, the gods gave Isis the head of a cow, and she again entered the fray, her harpoon finally striking Seth. Roaring, he left the waters. So a new trial was devised, one that would keep the other gods out of the conflict. Both would have to sail ships made of stone. Seth carved his ship of stone, and it sank, while Horus simply displayed the appearance of a stone ship. Everyone agreed that it conformed to the agreement, for he had ingeniously made his ship of wood and covered it in plaster. Horus sailed on and claimed victory, but Seth, transforming once again into a hippopotamus, sank Horus’s ship. It was then, alone on the beach, that Horus was overcome by his righteous anger. He struck Seth with his mace and bound him hand and foot. Then he dragged Seth to the tribunal and the waiting gods. And it was only when faced with the threat of Seth’s impending execution before the entire assembly that Ra finally agreed that Horus was right. Delighted, the gods crowned the child-falcon supreme lord. As Horus stepped on the neck of the vanquished one, Seth swore solemn obedience, and proclaimed the battle ended. Then Seth withdrew to his desert kingdom to live forever among foreigners. Thoth wisely organized the new responsibilities, and Horus helped Ra to destroy the treacherous serpent Apophis, who had until then menaced Ra’s radiant ship. At times the blood of that ancient beast colored the skies red, and sailing in his celestial ship Ra calms the waves that travel to the West.

The Antimyth of Amenophis IV[23]

There was a kind and wise pharaoh who understood the origin of Ptah and the changing of his names. He reestablished principles when he saw how certain men, pretending to be the voice of the gods, oppressed other men. One morning, he saw how a vassal was being tried in the temple for not paying tribute to the gods—that is, for not paying the priests. And so he left Thebes for On,[24] and there he asked the wisest theologians what true justice consisted of. This was their answer: “Amenhotep, your liver is good, as are the intentions that arise from it. But the most kindhearted truth will bring misfortune upon you and upon our people. As a man you will be the most just. As king you will bring only ruin—but your example will not be forgotten, and many centuries after you are gone, what is seen today as madness will gain renown.”

Returning to Thebes, the pharaoh looked at his wife as one studies the dawn, he saw her beauty, and for her and for his people he sang a beautiful hymn. The poet’s piety made Nefertiti weep; she knew his glory and his tragic future. In a faltering voice she proclaimed him the true son of the Sun. “Akhenaton!” she said, and then fell silent. In that moment, accepting the just but impossible, his destiny came into play. And so for a moment a world bearing the weight of millennia tottered; such was the rebellion of Akhenaton and the brief respite of the children of the Nile. Thus was overturned the power of those who made the gods speak, not with the gods’ intentions but with their own.

Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton) launched the struggle against the functionaries and priests who dominated the empire, and the lords of the Upper Nile allied themselves with the ranks of the persecuted. The people began to fill positions that had previously been forbidden to them, reclaiming the power that had been stripped from them. The granaries were opened and goods were distributed.

But the enemies of the new world took up arms and raised the specter of hunger. With the death of Akhenaton, they scattered all his deeds to the wind—wishing to wipe out his memory forever. Aton, however, preserved his word.

This was the poem that started the fire:[25]

“The whole Earth surrenders to your work—so, too, do all roads open at your rising. In woman you make the egg fertile and create the seed in man. You make the child live in the womb of the mother, soothing the child so that it does not cry; nourishing the child in the womb, you give the breath of life to what you have created. When the child bursts from the womb on the day of its birth, you open its mouth so that it may cry out, and later speak. You give breath to the young bird in the egg. You help it to crack the shell, and, newborn, to chirp and walk on its feet. Your face is unknown, O only god! You created the Earth as you desired, with men and beasts and every forest animal, and all that is on the Earth and all that walk upon their feet, and all that are in the sky, and all that fly on their wings. And you have formed the foreign lands, and Syria and Nubia, and the lands of Egypt. You have set each man in his place, providing his necessities—affording all with bread and measuring the span of their lives. You have made us different from the foreign peoples. Their tongues are different in the words they speak, and so, too, are their characters and their skins; you have set apart the foreign peoples. And you have made the Nile in the Tuat, leading it where you will, to give life to the people, to your creation. O you, lord of all, you toil for them, O Aten of the day, great in dignity! And all the foreign and distant countries, you also help them, bringing them life. You have set a Nile in the heavens, which descends for them, and like a sea brings waves to the mountains and bathes their lands and their fields. Perfect are your designs, O lord of eternity. The Nile of the heavens is your gift

to us, to those who dwell in foreign lands, and to all the animals great and small, to all the creatures of the desert that go upon their feet. Your rays nourish all the plants, and they live and grow for you. You make the seasons so that everything you have created may develop—the winter so that they may refresh themselves, the summer because it pleases you. You have made the distant sky so that there you might shine and gaze down upon all. You alone, resplendent in your form of living Aten, rising, shining, departing, and returning. You alone take on countless forms: cities, towns, fields, roads, and rivers—every eye sees you before it. You are Aten of the day. Even when you depart and every eye you have created sleeps and can no longer see you or what you have created—still you are in my heart. Your creation, the Earth, lies in your hand. If you shine, she lives, and if you disappear, she dies. You are the very span of life!”

IV. Hebrew Myths

The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life

"…Out of the ground the Lord God made grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. And in the midst of the garden, he set the tree of life and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil.… And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die.'"[1]

And so it was that Adam and Eve lived in Eden, where a river flowed out to water the garden, and from there it divided into four streams. The name of the stream that flowed around the land of Havila, where there is gold, was Pishon. The second one, which encircled the land of Cush, was Gihon. The name of the third, hidden and shaded, which flowed to the east of Assyria, was Hiddekel, and the fourth, of good and murmuring words, was Euphrates. And Eden overflowed with plants and animals, and our parents were the namers of all the living things there. But how could they give a name to the tree of life or that of the knowledge of good and evil if they did not know them, if they did not even approach them? So it was that they yearned for the knowledge that they did not have and did not even know how to attain.

One night, troubled by this question, Eve fell asleep, and, sleeping, she dreamed. In her dream, she saw the tree of knowledge shining in the darkness. As she approached the tree, there suddenly appeared before her a disquieting winged figure. Although beautiful to look upon, in the darkness she could not see its face—perhaps it was that of Adam. Its dew-dampened hair exhaled a fragrance that filled her with feelings of love. And Eve wished to see more. The figure, gesturing toward the tree, said: "O beautiful plant, heavy with fruit! Is there no one who will lighten your burden and taste your sweetness? Is knowledge so scorned? Is it only envy or an unjust prohibition that forbids your being touched? Let him forbid it who will! No longer will anyone deprive me of what you offer. If not for this, why are you here?" Having spoken, the figure hesitated no longer, but with trembling hand plucked the fruit and tasted of it.

In her dream, the audacity of the winged figure left Eve frozen in glacial horror, but immediately it exclaimed: "O divine fruit, you alone are sweet, and so much sweeter plucked in this way—forbidden, apparently set aside for the gods alone, and yet capable of converting men into gods! And why should they not be so? Good is increased the more it is shared, and in this its author, far from losing, only acquires more praise. Approach, fortunate creature, beautiful and angelic Eve—share this fruit with me!"[2]

Eve awoke with a start and recounted her dream to her companion. Adam then asked himself: "Does not God speak through dreams? If during the day he prohibits and by night he invites, how, with my meager knowledge, shall I know to which incitement I should respond? We should acquire this knowledge so as to direct our destinies, since God Jehovah created us but did not say how we should make our own selves." Then he told Eve his plan to take the fruit and run with it to the tree of life in order to become immune to the poison of knowledge. So it was that they waited, until the God Jehovah strolled through the garden in the cool of the afternoon, and when he had passed by they went to the tree. Seeing a serpent gliding among the branches toward the fruit, they thought its venom must derive from that food. And because of this they

doubted, and while they doubted time passed, and the God Jehovah began his return to the garden.

Then they thought they heard the serpent whisper: “You shall not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”[3] The snake was not lying, but wanted to stop them from eating from the other tree, the tree of life.[4] As it was already very late, Adam and Eve tasted the fruit, and the eyes of both of them were opened. But when they wanted to reach the tree of immortality, the God Jehovah blocked their way, keeping them from fulfilling their plan.

Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and what if he now reaches out his hand and takes also from the tree of life, eats, and lives forever?” Therefore, the Lord God drove him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he came. He cast out the man, and to the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword of flame that turned in all directions so as to guard the way to the tree of life.[5]

And so Adam and Eve went out from Eden, but their gaze was always turned toward Paradise, whose presence was revealed only by the smoke of the sword of fire during the day and its radiance during the night. And they did not return because they could not, but since they believed it pleased him they began to offer the God Jehovah sacrifices of fire and smoke. And with time, many peoples came to think that the gods preferred the high mountains and the volcanoes because these are the bridges between the Earth and the heavens. And so when the time came, it was from the fire, from the mountain, that the God Jehovah delivered the Law for which humankind searched so that they might make straight their Destiny.[6]

Abraham and Obedience

Many generations passed from the time of the patriarchs to that of the Flood. And it was after the deluge that Jehovah set the rainbow in the sky to seal his pact with men that all seed would continue to multiply. And still later, Terah took his son Abram and his daughter-in-law Sarai from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan. Then Abram and Sarai went down to Egypt, but after a time they returned to Hebron. The livestock and goods of Abram had grown, but his heart was filled with sadness because at his age he still had no offspring.

Abram was already old when he conceived a child with his servant Hagar. But his wife Sarai and Hagar had a falling out, and Hagar departed for the desert, taking with her the cause of her affliction. Then an angel appeared and told her: “You have conceived, and upon giving birth you will name your son Ishmael, because Jehovah has heard your prayers. Ishmael, therefore, will mean ‘God hears,’ and his descendants will be many and his people will live in the deserts, worshipping God not by what the eye sees but by what the ear hears. And thus they will pray to God and God will hear them.” Much later, Sarai in her old age at last became pregnant, and although Abram was father of all of them and cared for them all as his own children, Sarai’s descendants and those of Hagar continued the dispute that had begun with their mothers.

Then God said: “From now on your name will not be Abram but Abraham, because you will be the father of a multitude, and Sarai will be named Sarah, like a princess of nations. As for your son with Sarah, you will name him Isaac.” There came a time when God put Abraham to a test. “Abraham!” he called. And Abraham replied, “Here I am.” God said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering on one of the hills that I shall show you.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took with him two of his men and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the sacrifice and set out for the place God had spoken of. On the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to his men, “Stay here with the ass, while I and the boy go over there to worship, and then we will return to you.” Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on the shoulder of his son Isaac; he himself carried the fire and the knife, and then the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father, Abraham, “Father!” And Abraham said, “What is it, my son?” His son said, “We have both the fire and the wood, but where is the young animal for the sacrifice?” Abraham said, “God will provide a young creature for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. He then bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son, but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, saying, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.” The Lord said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld you son, your only son, from me.” And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught by its horns in a thicket. Abraham took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. And so it was that Abraham called that place “The Lord Will Provide.”[7]

Perhaps the anguish of this terrible test remained in Abraham’s heart until his death. And thus, again and again he told himself: “Jehovah repudiates human sacrifice and, even more, the sacrifice of one’s own son. If he orders a sacrifice, I must not obey it because it would mean disobeying his prohibition. But to reject what he commands is also to sin against him. Must I obey something that my god rejects? Yes, if he demands it. But my dull-witted reason struggles, moreover, with the heart of an old man who loves the impossible gift that Jehovah gave him so late in life. Is this test the consequence of the laughter that filled me when I was told that my son would be born?[8] Is it not the laughter that Sarah stifled when she heard that prophecy?[9] For some reason Jehovah gave him the name ‘Isaac,’ which means ‘laughter.’ My wife and I were already old when we were told that we would have this child, and we could not believe that such a thing was possible. Does Jehovah play with his creatures as a child plays with sand? Or is it that, knowing his anger and his punishment, we overlook the fact that he also tests and teaches us with divine mockery?”[10]

The Man Who Fought Against a God[11]

It was night, and Jacob arose and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream and with them all that he had. Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him in the hollow of his thigh as he wrestled with him, so that Jacob’s hip was dislocated. Then the man said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” So the man said to Jacob, “What is your name?” And he answered, “Jacob.” Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,[12] for you have striven with God and with humans, and you have prevailed.” Then Jacob asked him, “Pray tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there the man blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel,[13] saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is spared.” The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.[14] Thus, to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew

that runs in the hollow of the thigh, because the man had struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.[15]

Moses and the Divine Law[16]

And so it happened that long ago the children of Israel settled in Egypt, and there they grew in number and power. Joyfully they celebrated the changes introduced by a wise pharaoh who wanted equality for all peoples. But the good king died in the midst of a great uproar that his enemies had unleashed. Now, instead of their peaceful existence, the Israelites found persecution and humiliation. When the children of Israel decided to leave those lands, the new pharaoh would not permit it. In those dark years, many Egyptians who were loyal to the just king were assassinated, and others were imprisoned or condemned to a life of labor in the quarries. It so happened that among these was a youth who, as a child, had been rescued from the waters of the Nile by the women of the good pharaoh. He had been educated in the court, and although he learned the language of Israel, he always spoke it with difficulty.

Moses, "He Who Was Rescued from the Waters," fled from the quarry and took refuge in the countryside, in the house of a priest in the land of Midian. The priest was also one of those persecuted because of his loyalty to the just king, and so he received Moses, who had sought refuge there. When Moses told him the story of his rescue from the waters, the priest reflected that it very much resembled the legends of Osiris and Sargon (who also was thus saved in Babylon, as related by those who came with Abraham from Ur of Chaldea). It was here that Moses took as his wife the daughter of the priest. And one day, while herding the sheep of his father-in-law, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flames of a burning bush. Moses looked and the bush was blazing, and yet was not consumed by the fire. Then Moses said to himself, "I must go to look at this wondrous sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that Moses had come to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And Moses answered, "Here I am." Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for you are standing on holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the hand of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your forefathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I am that I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, *'I am* has sent me to you.'" And God said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations."[17]

When Moses returned to Egypt he was met by Aaron of the priestly tribe of Levi, who had already been visited by dreams in which Moses received the divine mandate. Aaron helped Moses to spread the word among the Israelites, and, on reaching the pharaoh, he ordered him, saying: "Let my people go forth from Egypt." But this the pharaoh was reluctant to do, and so the priest Aaron performed great wonders with his staff before the eyes of all those assembled there. In reply, Pharaoh called on his sages and priests, and they also showed their power, and

Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then Jehovah, through Moses and Aaron, changed the water of the river to blood, and the fish died and the frogs also left the river and infested everything. But Pharaoh did not heed these signs. And so, plagues of lice and flies, cattle plagues and plagues of ulcers, plagues of hail and locusts—all these afflicted both man and beast. But Pharaoh did not want to free the children of Israel, saying that it was not unknown for the river to unleash disasters of this kind, as from time to time torrential floods carried down red mud from the Upper Nile. Then a great darkness descended and remained for three days. And the sages of the pharaoh explained that it was but clouds of water rising from the flooded river that were darkening the sky.

So it was that Jehovah ordered Moses to warn Pharaoh that if he did not free the people of Israel, the firstborn of Egypt would die. But Pharaoh still did not listen, and that night the angel of the Lord brought death to the children of the Egyptians. The Israelites had marked their doors with the blood of the Paschal lamb as a sign to protect them from the angel of death, and from then on they called that month the first month of the year. Only then did Pharaoh allow the people of Israel, and all the persecuted Egyptians, to leave. The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 men on foot, besides their dependants. And with them also went a large company of every kind of people.[18]

The people were able to cross the Red Sea untouched by the waters, since these were held back both to the right and the left in canals that Amenophis IV had ordered built. Pharaoh dispatched soldiers to destroy those who had fled, but when his men reached this place their heavy chariots fell, and with this the army was drowned by the waters that covered them. Once more Jehovah had saved Moses from the waters, and with him the multitude that had gone out from Egypt.[19]

And a plant that Moses put in them sweetened the bitter waters.[20] And Jehovah gave the people What-Is-This to eat.[21] Sustained in this way, the people did not die in the desert, and made their way to the sacred Mount Sinai.

Mount Sinai was now wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain shook with a great quaking. As the blast of the trumpet grew ever louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in a peal of thunder. Then the Lord descended upon the top of Mount Sinai, and the Lord summoned Moses to the mountaintop, and Moses went up.[22]

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance.[23]

And so, God Jehovah gave men the Law that they had sought since the time of their first fathers. On two stone tablets God engraved the Ten Commandments that men had to observe in order to draw near to him. And he also gave them laws that would serve to shape them over the course of their history. Thus did Moses guide Israel to the land promised by the Lord. And from the fields of Moab he climbed Mount Nebo to the summit of Pisga, opposite Jericho. And then Moses saw. And the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over into it.” Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord’s command. He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but to this day no one knows his burial place.[24]

And never since has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face-to-face. He was unequaled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to work in

the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying deeds that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.[25]

V. Chinese Myths

The Central Void…[1]

Emptiness always was, an emptiness that can never be filled. Emptiness that was previous to the world. The Tao is the emptiness that existed before the gods.[2]

Thirty spokes converge toward the hub of one wheel, but it is the void in the center that makes the wheel useful.[3] Clay is molded to make a pot, but it is the space that does not contain clay that makes it useful. We make doors and windows in a house, but it is the empty space that makes the room useful. And so things come from existence, but their utility comes from nonexistence.

All was void, and Pangu slept within that which was united, that which was called “infinite depth.”[4] And then he awoke. Immediately, he took his axe and broke the egg that enclosed him, shattering it into myriad pieces. The lightest pieces and the heaviest pieces flew off in different directions. To impede their rejoining, Pangu placed himself in the empty center. Like a column that gives balance to all creation, he made solid the Earth and the sky. Later he rested, and once again fell asleep, until his body had given forth numerous beings.[5] From one eye came the sun and from the other the moon. From his blood, rivers and lakes were formed, and animals from his skin, while his hair became the plants and his bones the minerals.

In those earliest times, gigantic and monstrous gods lived upon the Earth. The upper half of the god mother Nüwa was very beautiful, but her lower half was like that of a dragon. After traveling and visiting every place, at length she discovered that there were no beings more beautiful or intelligent than the giants. And so she went to the Yellow River, where she molded the first human beings out of clay. She made them similar to herself, but instead of the tail of a dragon she gave them legs so that they would walk erect. Finding them amusing, she decided to make many. To do this she took a bulrush and let drops of mud fall from it. Upon reaching the ground these drops became women and men, and when they began to reproduce on their own the celestial mother turned to creating other beings.

When Fu Shi, the companion to the goddess, saw that humans could learn, he taught them to make fire by rubbing sticks together. Then he gave them rope and showed them how to protect themselves from hunger and harsh weather. Finally, he gave them the art of the hexagrams, which he called I Ching. In time, this became known as the *Book of Transformations* and a means of divination.

One day it happened that the immortals began to argue among themselves, until they began a war that put the whole Universe in danger. Floods and catastrophes ravaged the Earth, until at last the god of fire prevailed over the waters. Still, the giants wished to fight against the power of the eternals, but the gods in their unspeakable anger cut off the heads of the giants and cast them into the dark abysses.

The Dragon and the Phoenix[6]

When the waters were not yet under control and the overflowing rivers inundated the fields, the mother goddess gave birth to beneficent offspring, who began to give order to the chaos of the times. The brilliant dragons sailed through the waters and the sky as they brought under

control the rivers and lakes, the sea and the clouds. On high they roared, as with tiger paw and eagle talon they rent the curtains snapping in the great gusts of wind, unleashing the rains. They gave the rivers their courses, contained the lakes, and gave depth to the seas. They made the caverns from which water gushes forth, and they made the subterranean channels through which the water flows great distances, to later spring suddenly to the surface, untouched by the scorching sun. They traced the lines that run through the mountains and allow the energy of the Earth to flow, balancing the health of that gigantic body. And more often than not they had to struggle with problems provoked by gods and men, busy with their irresponsible strivings. Smoke would pour out from between their jaws, a life-giving and humid mist, a creator of unreal worlds. With their scaly, serpentine bodies they would cut through the storms and cleave the typhoons. Against their powerful horns and sharp teeth no obstacle could endure, no entanglement could stand. And they were much given to appearing to the mortals. Sometimes they would appear in dreams, sometimes in grottoes, sometimes along the shores of lakes—particularly those places where it was their custom to hide their crystalline dwellings, whose beautiful gardens were adorned with sparkling fruits and the most precious stones.

Immortal Long, the celestial dragon, always placed his activity (his Yang) at the service of the Tao, and the Tao recognized this, allowing him to be in all things, from the largest to the smallest, from the great Universe to the least particle. Everything that has lived has lived thanks to Long. Nothing has remained immutable save the unnamable Tao; even the silently nameable Tao is transformed, thanks to the activity of Long. And not even those who believe in Heaven and Hell can ensure their permanence.[7]

But Long loves Feng, the Phoenix bird who concentrates the seed of things, who contracts that which Long extends. And when Long and Feng are balanced, the Tao shines like a pearl bathed in the purest light. Long does not struggle against Feng—because they love each other, they search for each other, making the pearl shine. Because of this, the wise arrange their lives according to the balance between the Dragon and the Phoenix—the images of the sacred principles of the Yang and the Yin. The sages position themselves in the empty place, searching for equilibrium. The wise understand that non-action generates action and that action generates non-action. May the beating hearts of all living things and the waters of the sea, the day and the night, the winter and the summer, follow the rhythm marked for them by the Tao.

At the end of this age, when the Universe will have reached its greatest extension, it will contract once again like a falling stone. Everything, even time, will invert, returning to the beginning. The Dragon and the Phoenix will meet again. The Yang and the Yin will interpenetrate; so great will be their attraction that they will absorb everything into the empty seed of the Tao. The sky above, the Earth below—with this the creative and the receptive are determined, with this the changes and transformations are revealed.[8]

But no one can really know how things have been or how they will be, and if someone did know they would not be able to explain it.

So it is that: To know that you do not know is best; he who pretends to know when he does not, has an infirm mind. He who recognizes an infirm mind as infirm does not have an infirm mind. The mind of the wise is not an infirm mind, because the wise recognize the infirm mind as infirm.[9]

VI. Indian Myths

Fire, Torment, and Exaltation[1]

These are the gods who took so many unrecognizable forms. The Fire[2] and the Storm[3] gave rise to the creation, but they are nothing without the Exaltation[4] that inspires the words of the poet.

O Agni, you who gather the gods together,[5] son of two mothers—you who present your many forms to humankind,[6] protect us from those who would kill us. O you, youngest of the gods,[7] receive our praise, you whose words are honey for us.[8] Even Gotama exalts you,[9] who are the fire that illuminates the forests and gives light in the night, you who roam like a free creature that knows no herder. You of the blackened face who gives savor to the earth.[10]

I proclaim the feats of Indra, lord of the lightning. Slaying the first of the serpents, you annihilated the actions of the demons and gave birth to the sun, to the sky, to the dawn. Slaying Vrta, hurling your thunderbolt into his back, Vrta fell like a slaughtered ox; he went bellowing to the ocean, and from his orifices was liberated the waters that they held, because their original lord and guardian the serpent was no more.[11] I invoke Indra, you who drink of Soma, I invoke you so that I may prosper in combat, so that I may destroy my enemy and take his goods as booty.[12] I invoke Indra—the storm is the sign of your fury.

In you we place our hope, O juice of Soma. The daughter of the sun purifies the Soma that flows through the filters of sheep's hair, and then the cows whose milk prepares him so that Indra may be intoxicated and strike his enemies, so that he may dispense his generosity.[13] Soma, lord of the gods, who leaps into the vessels through the filters of sheep's hair, and whose friends jump and shout joyfully in their exaltation.[14] O red god, we sweeten you, mixing you with milk. The eagle imbibes of you and attains to the power of Indra. You are our support; you are most active[15] when your forces awaken like the roaring river.[16] Bestow upon us the gifts of heaven and of the Earth, O juice of Soma.[17]

Time and the Gods

And so the Canticle of Creation tells us: Then there was neither existence nor nonexistence, and that Unfathomable breathed by its own nature. Previous to the gods, he formed everything, or perhaps not; perhaps he knows everything, or perhaps not.[18] But gods and men have been created and they have their time. Yes, they have their time.

One day of the gods is equal to one year of the mortals. And so one year of the gods is the same as 360 mortal years. Now then, there exist four Ages (Yugas) that form one Great Age (Mahayuga) of 12,000 divine years, corresponding to 4,320,000 mortal years. And so, 1,000 of these Great Ages (Kalpa) last 4,320,000 ordinary years, or simply one day of Brahma. But at the end of the day the god sleeps, and the Universe collapses.

Brahma sleeps upon his great serpent, and everything is absorbed back into him. Worlds fall out of orbit and crash into each other; all land liquefies, all liquid evaporates, all vapor is converted to energy, and this energy falls within the power of the night of Brahma. And when the god awakens, the great lotus opens, the light escapes from it, and a new day begins. On that day, fourteen beats (Manvantaras) follow one another, and in them the gods and worlds are

created: fish, birds, insects, animals, and men. Some seventy-one series of Great Ages follow one another for every fourteen beats. Each beat, then, comprises 852,000 divine years, or 306,720,000 mortal years in which divine energy spreads out from its center. And so, the history of humanity today finds itself in one beat, and within this beat in one of the seventy-one series of Great Ages. As each Great Age is divided into four unequal Ages, it happens that in the first (Krita Yuga), 4,800 divine years or 1,728,000 ordinary years pass; in the second (Treta Yuga), 3,600 or 1,296,000; in the third (Dvapara Yuga), 2,400 or 864,000; and in the fourth (Kali Yuga), 1,200 or 432,000. Consequently, in this entire cycle the human being must be 4,320,000 years old. But since human beings already find themselves in the Fourth Age, at least 3,888,000 of its years must already have passed since its creation. All beings decay as they move further from the original creation, and doubtless the human being, too, follows this tendency.

In the Age of Krita, justice is eternal. In that age, the most excellent of the Yugas, everything has already been done (Krita) and nothing is left undone. Duty is not neglected and morality does not decline. Later, with the passage of time, this Yuga falls to a lesser state. In that Age there were no gods; there was no buying or selling; no effort needed to be made. The fruit of the Earth was obtained simply by desiring it, and both justice and detachment from the world prevailed. Illness did not exist, nor did a diminishing of the sensory organs with the passing of years; malice did not exist, nor weeping nor pride nor deceit; neither arguments nor hatred, cruelty, fear, affliction, jealousy, nor envy existed. In this way, the supreme Brahma was the transcendental support for these perfect beings. In that era, all humans were alike in the object of their faith and in their knowledge. Only one formula (mantra) was used and only one rite. There was only one Veda.

In the following age, in the Treta Yuga, sacrifices began. Justice decreased by one-quarter. Men adhered to the truth and were dedicated to a righteous dependence on ceremonies. Sacrifices prevailed, along with the sacred arts and a wide array of rites. Peoples' actions came to depend upon tangible ends, and they sought recompense for the rites and their charity. No longer were they concerned with austerity and simple generosity.

Still later, in the Dvapara Yuga, justice diminished by two quarters. The Vedas quadrupled. Some studied four Vedas, others three, others two, and others none at all. The writings having been divided in this way, the ceremonies were celebrated in the most varied ways. Even those who practiced austerity and charity became filled with passion. Due to the ignorance of the one Veda, the Vedas multiplied. And with the decline of good, only a few remained loyal to the truth. When mankind fell away from the truth, destiny brought them under attack from all manner of illnesses, desires, and calamities, and because of this they suffered many afflictions and were motivated to practice austerity. Others offered sacrifices, pursuing heaven's blessings and their own pleasures. In this way, through its own iniquity, mankind declined.

In the Kali Yuga, only one-quarter part of justice remained. In this dark age, rituals and sacrifices ceased. Many calamities prevailed—illnesses, hardships, and sins such as anger, want, anxiety, hunger, and fear spread. The practices generated by the degradation of the Yugas frustrated the intentions of humankind. This is the Kali Yuga, which has been in existence lo these many centuries.[19]

The trifle that is human history would have no meaning if Brahma were not in it. What are the seventy-one series of Mahayugas in which the human being is created and destroyed but just one of the fourteen Manvantaras, and what are all these but one Kalpa—just one day of Brahma? In countless reincarnations, human essence continues becoming purified. Responding to the universal law of Karma, regressing and advancing according to its actions, it continues

preparing its next life. But in the most profound depths of all human beings lies Atman. And so, when they reach this Atman, they discover that they are Brahma. However, this disconcerting equivalence will only become clear on the day in which, renouncing happy contemplation, the compassion of the liberated living-being—known through the centuries as the *enlightened one*—reaches men.[20]

The word Om calls to the glory of Brahma,[21] cause of limitless time and space, variable in form and invariable in substance. May Brahma be eternally adored.[22]

The Forms of Beauty and Horror[23]

Why should the gods bestow their gifts upon the supplications of insignificant mortals? Why could these great beings take an interest in the outcome of such small matters—in quarrels and tribulations, in hopes and devotions? Could it be that these enormous powers are assigned to a small region of the unfathomable Universe; could it be that at every point where a star shines, there dance other gods of whose destinies we have never known? Be that as it may, the nearest gods walk among us, transformed so that we may see them. Incarnated as mortals, in a thousand avatars they traverse existence. The ancient fathers said that thanks to the oblations and our right actions, the gods increase their power. This explains how it is that often we receive favors from them, and that every so often they take part in a just cause as compensation for the power that we give them. Yet the dark demons wish to grow by feeding on the twisted nature of things, and, growing, they hope to darken the heavens themselves. The great powers also help the smallest, created luminously, because their very essence exists even in the infinitesimal. It is not surprising that the least amount of a potion, almost unseen by the eye, can cause us to collapse if there is poison in it, or lift us up if there is healing in it. And the same happens with the potion of human actions offered to the kindly gods.

But there have been times when the eyes have been able to see—if such a thing can truly be seen with the eyes of the body—the great god of All. This is how he appeared before Arjuna[24] in his august and supreme form.

Then appeared the Divinity with infinite heads, swarming with eyes and mouths, covered in resplendent vestments and armed with all of the divine weapons. For a moment Arjuna was lost in contemplation of the numerous limbs of the Cosmos. The Lord was like an explosion of colors so brilliant they were painful, or an immense roar that thundered through space. But in that brief instant the Lord was shown in his infinite diversity, a diversity that extended even to the most inconceivable and monstrous forms. All the powers of the world were crushed in his ferocious jaws, as with inconceivable speed all existence separated from itself and was dissolved. Finally, the frightened Arjuna succeeded in thinking—for his words and muscles had been slow to respond to his will—and he began to call out: “Lord, show yourself in a more familiar form. Let me see you crowned, holding your mace and discus. Once again assume your four-armed form and come, my lord Krishna with the attractive human figure, allow my heart to beat again and my reason to return.”[25]

The ancient book *Skanda Purana* tells of a demon named Durg who, having made sacrifices to appease Brahma, received his blessing. With this power, Durg ousted the gods from the heavens, and, exiling them to the forests, obliged them to revere him and bow their heads in his presence. Then he abolished the religious ceremonies, and the gods, weakened by this, met to find a way out of this crisis in which they were trapped. Ganesha (son of Shiva and Parvati), the wise protector of human undertakings, shaking his elephant head, waved his four arms and

suggested that it was absolutely necessary to reach his parents. Hanuman the monkey king, astute and quick, conqueror of territories, was at once given the task of traveling to the Himalayas to beseech the help of the celestial couple.

There in the heights they meditated in loving embrace, in harmony and peace. Hanuman explained why he had come, and Shiva, moved to pity by the difficulties that beset the young gods, asked the delicate Parvati to deal with the problem.

Parvati calmed Hanuman, and only then did she send Night to demand that the demon reestablish order in the worlds in her name. Overcome with fury, Durg gave orders that Night was to be seized. But when he shouted the order, his fiery breath incinerated his own soldiers. Recovering, he dispatched his minions, but not before Night escaped and found refuge with her protector. In the deepest darkness, Durg, burning with anger, mounted his war chariot. Ruddy and radiant, his army of giants, winged horses, elephants, and men stood out against the eternal snows of the Himalayas. With a horrendous clamor, the impudent invaders set foot upon the sacred domain of Parvati, who with graceful movements brandished in her four arms the deadly weapons of the gods.

The troops of the arrogant Durg let loose their arrows against the imperturbable figure, who could be seen standing far off in the Himalayas. So dense was the rain of darts that it seemed like a sheet of raindrops in the great storm. But she deflected the attack with her invisible shields. Splitting trees and mountains, the aggressors threw them at the goddess—until at last she responded! A terrifying whistle was heard as she threw her first weapon; the winged horses neighed as they were carried away by the hurricane that accompanied Parvati's lance. Almost immediately her spear tore off the arms of thousands of giants, while various quadrupeds and their riders cracked into pieces with the terrible impact. Not only did the goddess repel all the arrows, stakes, maces, and pikes that Durg threw, but now their broken fragments also destroyed the nearest invaders.

Then Durg took on the form of an enormous elephant and charged Parvati, but she caught the feet of the beast in her lasso, and then with her scimitar-like nails cut him to pieces. From the spilled blood, a monstrous buffalo arose that immediately attacked her. But he ended up impaled on Parvati's trident. Badly wounded, he reverted to his true form and tried to flee, but the goddess lifted him into the air, and when she hurled him to the ground the Earth rumbled with the sound of thunder. Without hesitating, Parvati thrust her arm into the demon's jaws and pulled out his steaming viscera. Implacable, she crushed him in an embrace that made his blood gush forth, and this she drank until not a drop was left. Finally, so that Durg would not be reborn, she devoured his remains and, taking his bones in one hand, she squeezed them with such force that they were reduced to a powder that burst into flame. As she opened her fingers, the cold wind of the summits flew down and carried off a minuscule speck of ash as a memento. She received the offerings of the gods, and hastened back to her beloved Shiva. Most tender and beautiful, she took shelter with him in the softest music and the most delicate radiance of immortality.

VII. Persian Myths

The Clamor of Zarathustra[1]

Upon turning thirty, Zarathustra abandoned his land and took himself to a faraway place.[2] There he lived in his cave for a long time. He ate only from a wheel of cheese that never grew smaller, and he drank the pure waters of the mountain. At night the fire spoke to him, and so he came to understand the course of the stars. During the day the sun spoke to him, and so he came to understand the meaning of the light.[3] Very early one morning the clamor of the beasts of the field reached his cave—and, since the cows and the herd animals have a soul, Zarathustra listened to that great soul, Kine, asking God for his blessings. Kine, raising his lament, which was like a great lowing, said, “My soul suffers, Ahura Mazda.[4] Whom did you create me for? In whose image was I modeled? Grant me the good, save us from the assaults of the tribes that drag cattle to the slaughter. I feel surrounded by anger, violence, the scourge of desolation, an audacious insolence, and a furious pressure. Save my animals, O Ahura Mazda, you who provide us with green pastures!”

And so, Zarathustra, from the mouth of his cave, looked out on the day and entreated Ahura Mazda in this manner: “Let the Good Mind of Zarathustra guide those who till the Earth so that it may produce good pastures and strengthen the herds, so that the cows may give milk, and the milk cheese, and the cheese nourish the men who labor; so that the plunderer may never again bring ruin to the people, and instead become the friend who learns to work and share with them. So I give thanks for your teachings and for the nourishment you have provided. I remember my first questions, which I formulated with complete candor long ago, and which you, in turn, answered in your benevolence. And so it was that I asked you: Who gave birth to all and set the paths of the Sun, the Moon, and the stars?[5] Who maintains the Earth from below and the clouds from above so that they do not fall? Who made the waters, the winds, and the plants; who inspires our good thoughts;[6] who has created both dream and delight? Who gave birth to the dawn, to the day and the night, so that they might stand witness to our duty;[7] who was it who created Kine, without whom our lives would be a misery?[8]

“With infinite patience, Lord of the Light, you told me of Yima, the first father.[9] So it was that you said: ‘I, Ahura Mazda, ask you to meditate and to take up my law.’ But Yima responded that he could not meditate, teach, or take up my law. Then I entrusted him with looking after my worlds so that they would remain fertile. I brought him the weapons of victory and made straight the path toward Mother Earth, who carries both animals and men at her breast. In that new world, livestock, animals, and men multiplied because Yima with his golden lance had made fertile Spenta Amaiti, the Mother Earth.[10] And the people celebrated the vast empire of Mithra,[11] they fought with Indra,[12] they did not give the purified Haoma to the impure,[13] and they understood that to speak scornful words to a pure man is the first sin.[14]

“I asked you, and you have answered all of my questions,” said Zarathustra. “Since father Yima did not want to give wisdom, but rather to care for and extend your dominions, it is time that I did what befits your teaching.”

Light and Darkness

Each of the two primordial spirits is independent in thought, word, and deed.[15] In the beginning, they met so as to order the world, designating the worst life, Hell, for the wicked, and Heaven for those in the best of mental states.[16] Each of the two spirits made its own Kingdom, one giving form to the dwelling place of error and the other to the dwelling of justice. Ahura Mazda[17] chose all those who, because of their kindness, pleased him, while the Spirit of Evil personified chose the demon-gods and all those who helped to sully human life.[18] When the Deavas ally themselves with the Demon and the final battle is unleashed,[19] the Holy Mind will have won the Kingdom.[20] Of the first two spirits of the world, the kind one said to the wicked: "Neither our thoughts nor our commandments, neither our intelligence nor our beliefs, neither our works nor our conscience nor our souls agree on anything!"[21]

The Angels and the Savior: The End of the World, Resurrection, and Judgment

But now, in all things the Light of Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) and the Darkness of the Spirit of the Lie (Ahriman) are locked in struggle. And so, all beings have their good part as well as their impure part. Hence, it is the duty of the saint (in whom light predominates) to illuminate men, making darkness retreat. But at the end of the world, evil will feign triumph to bring confusion to the minds. Good people will be persecuted and the faults of the wicked attributed to them, and the wicked will feign righteousness. But this will be the time when Ohrmazd will send his son Saoshyant to save the world.[22] He will be aided by the allied spirits of the Light—the angels and archangels—as the Darkness will be aided by the hierarchies of demons. Each one will choose a side in the final battle, and then, in a universal cataclysm, Ohrmazd will destroy Ahriman, and, thanks to the empire of Ohrmazd, a new, pure world will arise. The dead will be resurrected, arrayed in glorious bodies. The angels and the archangels will build the Bridge of Judgment on which the just will cross over.[23] But the firm and splendid bridge will begin to close at the first steps of the reprobates, who will fall. The souls of all those who died in sin will join those who served the rule of evil and those who spoke falsehoods and those of bad conscience. All the unjust souls will be welcome in the Mansion of the Lie,[24] even as the souls of the just will come to dwell in the Mansion of Songs.

Zarathustra announced the reward of those who are apt for the cause, for those who can receive the gifts of the Good Mind that is within each human being.[25]

VIII. Greco-Roman Myths[1]

The Struggle Between the Generations of Immortals

From the union of eternal Uranus (Sky) and mother Gaia (Earth) were born the six Titans who, with their sister Titans, gave birth to a generation of gods. But it is with great Cronus (Time), the youngest Titan, that everything began to move in that flow in which the following succeeds the previous. Before Cronus, time ran in fits and starts in all directions: The past followed the future, and at times the moments passed in a concentrated jumble. In reality, mortals can say nothing of what was before the beginning of things (and, for this reason, some make Cronus the source of all that is thinkable).

The children grew angry with their parents, because every time a new brother was born, Uranus forced it to remain at Gaia's breast. And so it came about that Gaia fashioned a sharp sickle and, showing it to her children, she explained her scheme. It was her son Cronus who accepted the instrument that his mother proffered, and together they prepared an ambush. When Uranus, desirous of love, came to lie with Gaia, their resolute son came forth from the darkness, and, taking the genitals of his father, cut them off and threw them behind him.[2]

Having replaced his father as lord of the Universe, Cronus united with his sister Rhea, and they began to have offspring. But as soon as she would give birth to a son, Cronus would immediately devour the infant. In this way he hoped to ensure that none of his descendants would ever reach royal rank and force him from his place among the immortals. Rhea, unable to prevent the slaughter, pleaded for help from their parents, who knew that it was the destiny of Cronus to be replaced in power by one of his sons. In this way, the Erinyes, devoured[3] by monstrous Cronus, would be avenged, and the chain of murders plotted by keen-minded Cronus would be broken.[4]

When Rhea was about to deliver her next child, her parents sent her to Crete, and there in a cave on a secret mount she gave birth to great Zeus. Wrapping him in swaddling cloths, she presented him to his father, Cronus, to be devoured. But in reality she had taken a rock and disguised it to resemble the infant. The result was that Cronus vomited up the rock, along with the children he had previously swallowed. Eventually, Zeus had grown sufficiently to overthrow his father and take on his attributes. In this way, the glorious Zeus began to follow his Destiny—a destiny that would make him lord among the immortals. And so that they would remember the vicissitudes of their birth, he mounted the rock used in this deceit in a cleft below Parnassus.[5]

Eventually, the fated war arose between Zeus, his brothers, and their allies on one side, and Cronus and the Titans on the other. Zeus demonstrated his power, descending from sacred Mount Olympus with lightning bolts flashing, while the skies resounded with thunder and the swirling lightning made the sacred flame dance all around.[6] The Earth crackled with fire, the ocean waters boiled, and a burning cloud of smoke enveloped the Titans, while the brilliance of the lightning stole whatever vision they had left.[7] The great war continued until the gods, seizing the Titans with their bare hands,[8] bound them with chains and cast them into a dark and dank place in the depths of the mountain, there to be confined in the great Earth.[9]

Prometheus and the Awakening of the Mortals

I, Prometheus, saved the mortals from the Flood when I ordered Deucalion and Pyrrha to construct a boat. When the vessel at last gently came to rest in the mountains of Thessaly, I taught them how what had been devastated could be rebuilt. Friend of knowledge and peace, I am on the verge of achieving my objective, and for this reason I have gifted mortals with wisdom. Often, however, this knowledge is veiled by the dreams of domination that the gods inspire in men, so that they lose themselves and are returned to the dark times from which I rescued them. But have faith in the advance! And when the various sides face each other, repeat with me these bitter words that are no less true for their vulgar nature: “Idiot mortal, go forth and make war, destroy the fields and the cities. Violate the temples and the tombs, torture the vanquished—in this way you only prepare your own destruction!”[10] May this warning serve for something.

Like Zeus, I, Prometheus, am a son of Titans. He has never looked favorably on me, since I refused to take sides in the war between the Titans and the gods. And so it was. The gods won out, not because the Titans were evil but because Zeus was both prouder and more cunning than they. When the Olympians had finally become lords of the world, they were unwilling to abandon their tyrannical power and, seeing future enemies in the fragile humans, they cruelly attacked both their bodies and their minds. They smothered the mortals with superstition and shame, so that even today the lies of that tribe of immortal oppressors are respected still.

Who but I gave knowledge to the humans—these creatures who, century after century, looked but did not see, just as they listened but did not hear? They were like ghosts in a dream. Everything about them was muddled. Fearing the light, they lived in deep caverns. They knew nothing of how to make shelter from brick or wood, nor did they understand the succession of the seasons or the rising and setting of the stars. Everything they did was done without reason until I taught them how to yoke the beasts, to cultivate and harvest, to write numbers and letters, and to build the chariots that plow the waters.[11]

Having no knowledge, human beings could not make choices. Until I taught them, they had neither medicine nor metals. It was from me that they gained all the arts.[12] No doubt there are some who yet pay homage to the Olympians, still believing their false history—a history that goes like this:

“While the gods and mortals were locked in struggle, Prometheus tricked Zeus into accepting the bones and fat of the sacrifice, leaving the best parts for the people. In the face of this the Olympians said: ‘Prometheus, son of Iapetus,[13] how unequally you have distributed the portions!’ The tribes of man commemorate that fact every time they burn offerings of animal bones covered in smoking fat for the gods. To avoid similar deceptions that might benefit Prometheus’s friends and harm the Olympians, Zeus declared that kindling would no longer have the power to produce fire.

“Offending once again, clever Prometheus mocked the sacred plan. He stole the eternal flame and, hiding it inside a hollow branch, gave it to humankind. Seeing the flames in the distance and understanding their origin, thundering Zeus was filled with wrath. For this, and so that all might know it is impossible to transgress the divine will, he chained defiant Prometheus to a column set in stone. Thus, in spite of all his wisdom, the punishment that the son of Iapetus[14] earned was to be chained to the column, and every day an eagle would come and devour his liver, and every night his liver would grow back.”[15]

Whatever the false histories may say, the fact is that it was a human, Heracles, whose arrow dispatched the ravenous eagle. When Zeus came to know this fact, he resigned himself to my being burdened with a piece of the chain and the rock that I pulled up with the help of the hero. Foolishly, Zeus did not care to listen to the plan I had in mind for our mutual benefit. Only when I warned him of the danger that lay in the future did he reluctantly trade my liberty for the advice he needed. And, still obstinate, he thought my time was running out, for immortality had never been granted to me. But Chiron, good friend and teacher of mortals, exchanged my fate for his—choosing to descend to Hades, and leaving me with eternity in my grasp. Now, with hope always reborn despite privations and fatigue, I encourage humans so that they, too, might win liberty and their immortal destiny.

Demeter and Persephone: Death and the Resurrection of Nature[16]

To Demeter I sing, and to her daughter Persephone, who was abducted when she went to the fields to gather flowers. One hundred buds sprouted from a single root when she chose to grasp its branch. But at that moment the Earth itself resounded as it opened and spat forth the lord of Hades, carried by his black steeds. Against her will, Hades carried off the maiden to his subterranean realm.

No witness heard or saw the deed. And for nine days Demeter, searching for her child, did not partake of ambrosia. Finally, the all-seeing Sun told the grieving mother everything that had occurred: “No mortal is guilty of this act. Zeus alone is responsible, because he has made Hades a gift of your daughter, Persephone. But, O goddess, cease your weeping, for a son-in-law like Hades is not without worth—is he not the brother of generous Zeus?” Burning with fury, the goddess left the heavenly agora and vast Olympus. Disguising her features, making herself ugly so that she would not be recognized, she descended to the cities and the fields of men. But in her state, the blessings that Demeter normally bestows remained locked within her, so that no seed would germinate nor plant give forth fruit.

Then Zeus sent for the offended goddess, but she ignored his summons, intent as she was on being reunited with their daughter. So the father of the gods dispatched Hermes, he of the winged feet, to treat with infernal Hades. And Hermes said: “Hades, king of the dead, Zeus has sent me to bring forth Persephone from your domain so that her mother may see her. And, seeing her, Demeter may set aside her fury, which has stopped the seeds from sprouting, in this way threatening to end the fragile race of man.” Persephone leapt for joy when Hades prescribed the place whence she might depart. But Hades fed Persephone the mysterious seeds of the pomegranate so that she should soon return to their dark domain. Then Hades gave his chariot to Hermes who, accompanied by Persephone, began the return journey.

The reunion of mother and daughter moved the gods, and far-seeing Zeus sent mother Rhea to them, and in their meeting she said to Demeter:

“Come, my child, for thundering Zeus has summoned you to the family of the gods, and has promised to give you whatever honors you choose among the immortals. But he has said that your daughter must, during the course of the year, spend one-third of her time in the kingdom of the shadows, and the other two seasons she will spend with you and the other immortals. So he has said it shall be, and so he has confirmed with a nod of his head. Now come, my daughter, be persuaded, and do not continue to be angry, but quickly make the plants grow that men may live.” Demeter obeyed, and immediately caused flower and fruit to blossom throughout nature.

She explained how there are mysteries that, out of respect for the gods, are to be neither disregarded nor probed. Blissful are those who have contemplated these mysteries, because the uninitiated have no part in this, and after dying do not share the good fortune of seeing through the gloomy darkness!

Dionysus, the Divine Madness

None of us know anything at all; not even whether we know or do not know, nor if we know that we know or that we do not know; nor if in total there is something or whether there is not. Because things are as we believe them to be.[17] Therefore, reason should move aside and open another horizon for the gods to speak.

Wild Dionysus, I sing to you, crowned with ivy and laurel, son of Zeus and Semele, scion of the tribe of immortals. Raised by the nymphs of the forest, you fill the dark spaces with great fanfare—hail Dionysus, you of the many grape clusters.[18]

Semele doubted that her lover was really Zeus himself, and so she asked that he appear in all his power. When the Olympian fulfilled her wish, the apparition was so great and terrible that she fell dead as if struck down by lightning. Her unborn son was torn from her womb by the god, but as his gestation time was cut short, Zeus cut open his own thigh, inserted the child within it, and sewed the wound back up. When the time came, Zeus removed the living child from his leg. This is why he is called “Dionysus,” “Young Zeus,” and also “the Twice-Born.” But Hera, jealous of Zeus’s love for Semele, sought out the newborn to kill him. So it was that Dionysus had to be taken to Egypt where he was educated in deep caves. To further protect the child, Zeus, the father, transformed him into a young goat.

Dionysus was still young when he made wine from the vine. It was at that time that vengeful Hera found him and, driving him mad, sent him wandering through many countries, until the Asian Cybele—Great Mother of many peoples—purified him and returned his reason to him through mysterious procedures. Surrounded by his bacchantes, he carried the vine from people to people. Among those people was a tyrant who wished to destroy the sacred plant. But he went mad, and cut his own legs. Then, to avert the curse of the god, his subjects hacked him to pieces.

Before returning to Greece, Dionysus went to India, where he subjected the people to his inebriation and his rites. Back in Greece, yet another ruler opposed his cult, and as a consequence was torn to pieces by intoxicated and delirious women. After traveling from place to place, Dionysus desired to reach the Greek islands, and so he went to the shore, where he waited for a ship to pass.

Finally a ship arrived, its sailors intent on taking this stranger prisoner and selling him into slavery. But the crew saw vines growing all over the ship, while springs of wine flowed from the deck—and Dionysus himself transformed into a lion and began to roar menacingly. Driven mad, the sailors threw themselves into the sea, where they were changed into the dolphins that even today follow ships, always trying to explain to the sailors their bewildering destiny.

Dionysus continued his missionary labors. Encountering Ariadne of Crete (who, with her thread, had undone the labyrinth of the Minotaur), he delivered her from love’s pain. The god then continued onward in his panther-drawn chariot, in his hand the divine Thyrsus, his brow encircled with vine leaves and ivy. In every town he reached he established his cult, and at night by torchlight his inebriated devotees would dance to the sound of the tambourines, horns, and flutes. In divine ecstasy, the bacchantes overturned reason’s pretensions—and then, upon

regaining their senses, doubted what they had seen, both before and after. That is why, when celebrating the fusion of the teachings of dark Dionysus with luminous Apollo, the human soul yields up the ferocity of its unbridled instinct, and distant reason descends to comprehend these depths. And so, when vengeful Hera recognized Dionysus's merit, he was able to return to Olympus. Before this, however, he descended to hell, from where he brought the sad shadow of his mother, Semele, back to life.

IX. Nordic Myths[1]

Yggdrasil, the Tree of the World

To the house, powerful and courteous,
Three Aesir came from that family.
They came to Earth and found tired
Ask and Embla, luckless and weak.
Low in spirit and without inspiration
In life and word, lacking good color.
Odin raised their spirit, Honir gave them genius,
Lodur gave them words and good color.[2]

On the horizons of ice, in the cold winters of the Great North, what could be more loved than the tree—seed of fire, warm skin, and protector of the warrior horde—the serpent body that carries us in the Viking raid, tool of the fertile field, witness to the commitment we celebrate before it! We love the plant, and although the sun is made of gold, we feel it is like a plant. And so we have always dreamt that the world would end when the Wolf devours the sun, when a darkness envelops the Earth, when the plants die. We are descendants of Ask ("ash") and Embla ("elm"), two beautiful trees that were felled, and by the will of the gods—the Aesir, givers of form—returned to life as human beings.

Aesir and Asinias also loved the tree, and so it was there that they would meet to hold their deliberations. But better than those who converse about these things are those who know how to realize them.

Then asked Gangleri: "Where is it that the gods meet?"

Har replied: "At the ash tree, Yggdrasil. There the gods daily hold court and lay out the world's destiny." And Jafnhar added: "Its branches reach all the worlds, but its three roots begin where the Aesir[3] have their dwelling, Ginnungagap[4] where the Frost Giants live, and in Neflheim.[5] Beneath the last root is Hvergelmir,[6] where Nidhogg[7] gnaws on it. Under the root that runs toward the Frost Giants is Mimir's well,[8] where knowledge is to be found. It was here that Odin came to ask to be allowed to drink of its waters. His request was granted—but only after he gave one of his eyes as an offering."[9]

It is told that Odin, the great traveler, went to other countries in his ceaseless search for wisdom. During one of those voyages he descended into the depths of the mines and, seizing the dwarf Alberecht, they say, made him turn over the helmet of invisibility and the ring that held the great secret of Rhine gold that the gnome had robbed from its nymph custodians. It was over this that the giants Fafner and Otr fought with Odin. One of the giants, his skull crushed, fell lifeless, while the other changed himself into a dragon, lived, and became guardian of the treasure of the Nibelungen. That is, until finally Sigfried (our Sigurd) killed him, seizing the ring, source of so many troubles—troubles that continued until finally they destroyed all those who became involved with it, for only the wisdom of Odin could manage those forces. How could Odin—he who would sometimes even consult the hanged, and who in all his undertakings is driven by the "thirst for knowledge"—how could Odin not have gone to the Norns so as to drink of the water of knowledge?

Odin pleaded with the three Norns that he might drink of that water, but they would allow it only if he gave one of his eyes in exchange. Cursed be those three, who lanced the divine face only so as to accumulate more wealth![10] These three women, named Urd,[11] Verdandi,[12] and Skuld,[13] shape the days of men. But there are still other Norns who determine the life of the humans, the elves, and the gnomes. Good lives are governed by the good Norns, bad by those of wicked lineage.

But there is much more to recall—how could one forget Balder's horse, which accompanied the hero to the funeral pyre upon his death; or Odin's horse, magnificent Sleipnir, who with eight hoofs encompassed the distances of the world? And what of the joyful memory of the two swans, nurtured in the sacred waters?[14]

Thor, the Valkyries, and Valhalla: The Warrior and His Heaven

Of all the Aesir, Thor is the strongest. The greatest dwelling known lies within his kingdom. The god travels in his chariot, pulled by two magnificent goats. With him he carries three powers. The first is the hammer, Mjollnir, which resounds like thunder and which the skulls of the ice trolls and the giants of the mountains know well. Another power lies in his belt, which increases his strength when he puts it on. Finally, with the power of his iron gloves he takes up his hammer, and thanks to the gloves the handle does not slip from his grasp, even when he delivers his furious blows. Tremendous as is Thor's energy, he is not alone on the fields of war. When the battle begins, the Valkyries ride and choose those who are destined to die with valor, so that they may carry these heroes to Valhalla.[15] There they will find enormous gates, and rooms built of shields; there they will find tables and goblets, there they will eat the sacred boar.

At dawn the warriors leap from their beds, take up their weapons, and rush onto the battlefields. There they meet in single combat and they fight, hurling each other to the ground. What better entertainment could fill the days of heroes? In the evening they return to Valhalla on their horses, and passing through its gigantic doors they are made comfortable in the great hall. Linking their arms, they form long chains, and as if moved by the winds of the sky or the waves of the sea they sway right and left as they roar out their songs. Later, as friends, they sit together and drink.[16]

Ragnarök, the Destiny of the Gods[17]

Then the Terrible Winter will come, and in the icy winds and ceaseless frost the snow will blow without end. There will be great battles incited by greed. Brother will mete out death to brother, and families will be annihilated, lost in murder and incest.[18]

In her song, the old Seer foretold how in Völuspá the guardians of hell will burst their chains asunder. She sang of the fall of the gods[19] and the collapse of the world;[20] she foresaw how one wolf would devour the sun while another would swallow the moon. She saw how the stars fell and listened to the trembling of the Earth. She prophesied how the chains that hold fast Fenris Wolf would be sundered, and how the Earth would be destroyed from end to end when the sea serpent roils the oceans and finally comes forth onto dry land.

The ship Naglfar, constructed of the fingernails of the dead, will be completed and embark on its voyage across the sea. But the gods will try to delay the launching because it will mean that many corpses will not be gathered in a timely way, their hair and nails continuing to grow

with no one to cut them. The sky will part and the ash tree, Yggdrasil, will tremble. The Aesir will strap on their shining armor and advance toward the field of battle. Odin in his golden helmet will be fighting in the very jaws of Fenris Wolf; Thor will deal death to the great serpent, but will in turn fall dead from its venom; Vitharr will break the jaws of the wolf. They will battle until all the Aesir and all the monsters destroy each other. Finally, Surtur, hurling his fire, will incinerate the world.[21]

What, then, will remain of heaven and Earth? And what of the gods? The seer foretells that the images of the gods and the Earth with its ancient peoples will have evaporated like a hallucination, like those from which Thor suffered when he thought he was being defeated. The illusion of this world and the gods who corresponded to this world will have vanished. Then the humans who are hiding will be nourished on morning dew. The Earth will be beautiful and green—it will bear fruit without sowing, and there will be palaces floating in the air. Everyone will gather and converse, remembering their ancient wisdom, and they will speak of the events that took place, of the Serpent that surrounds the Earth, and of Fenris Wolf. In the fields they will also find those gold pieces with which the Aesir played on their boards. Humanity will be ready to learn, and because of this, human beings will begin to walk among the gods. But now there is nothing more to add, because these things have not yet come to pass.

With this the cycle of the last Viking is closed. Haki heard the voice, while his long serpent slithered toward the sea. Haki heard the sentences directed at his son, while the dense mist settled like a cloak on his shoulders. A red light burned far off in the fog, and the roar of the waves kissed the murmur of his words. So spoke Haki: “Do not confuse these fables with those that have been rendered innocent of the knowledge we have received. For now, these will continue to reach strange, intolerant people who erase the memory of other peoples. These people like to hear that Yggdrasil withers because Odin cut one of its branches to make his spear. They will lick their lips with delight because Odin lost an eye. They will rejoice because our heaven falls with a dreadful crash, for this appears to them to presage their dawn.

“We have told our things in this way, but of them they know nothing. Yggdrasil will rise up, immense and shining in the night, the entire heavens rotating about the axis of its Great North, while its apex connects with the fixed star and the sun turns pale on the frozen horizons. They will celebrate their most important day with our snow-covered tree, and on its top will be the fixed star, and that night we will send them gifts, descending from the sky in a golden sleigh pulled by reindeer. Our goblins, trolls, giants, and magic rings will inhabit their dreams and stories. Our forests will call them, and when they turn their heads quickly they will manage to glimpse an elf. They will hear the song of the nymph in the murmuring brooks and they will seek the pot of gold that the gnomes leave at the end of the rainbow.

“But let us go now! In our blizzards and glaciers the volcano erupts and the geyser hurls forth its heat. Tighten your hand on the helm, son and friend! We have already left the known fjords. In the aurora borealis the dancing gods change color, while we down here ride the waves of the furious sea.”[22]

X. American Myths

Popol Vuh (*Book of the Quiché People*)[1]

The Lost History

In the book of the Popol Vuh is depicted the arrival of the first inhabitants from the other side of the sea.[2] Here is recounted the history of darkness and life that was in the new world. This is the first book that was drawn in ancient times.[3] This great tale recounts how the heavens, the Earth, and the hells were formed; how each one was divided into four points; how the measuring cord was extended and each of the four points were divided. With four points were formed the squares that were each further divided into three: the squares of the Sky, the Earth, and the underground world.

Human Generations: The Man-Animal, the Man of Clay, the Man of Wood, and the Man of Corn

As the Makers worked, they thought that when they had made light, a being would appear who would invoke them. To invoke them, this being would have to know how to speak, to name. It would have to eat, drink, and breathe. For this future being they created a suitable world, with land, water, air, plants, and animals. Having finished that creation, they said to the animals: “Speak and praise us!” But the animals could not speak. Instead, each animal began to screech in its own way. The Creators and Makers then said: “We have not succeeded in making animals who can speak and invoke our name.” So they spoke to them again, saying: “This is not good. Your flesh will be shredded.” And so the animals became food for one another.

As dawn approached, the Makers said that they must hurry and try again. Then they made a man of mud, but he could move neither his head nor his limbs. He could speak, though he had no understanding. He lasted for a time, but then became wet and could no longer stand erect. And so they undid their work and took counsel together.

They decided to make a man from wood, and so they made puppet men who could speak and could drag themselves over the Earth. These manikins had children who were also wooden puppets. But they were bloodless, their hands and feet dry. With the failure of these manikins, the Makers sent a great rain. They caused a flood to fall from the deep of the Sky. And all the beings rebelled against the wooden men. The animals great and small, the stones, the plates, the crockery, the pots—all rose up and began to scream: “You have burned us, and now we will burn you. You struck us, and now we will strike you!” Without knowing where they were going, the wooden men climbed onto the houses, but they were thrown from the roofs. They hid in caves, but these closed in on them, crushing them. And so they were wiped out. There are those who say that their descendants are the monkeys that live today in the forests. These beings look like men, but in fact they are the successors of the wooden manikin people.

The Makers spoke together and decided to put healthy food and drink inside the human being, and so they formed their flesh from white and yellow corn meal and prepared liquids with which they made their blood, making them stout and full of vigor. Since they looked like men,

they ended up being men. They were beautiful, good, and endowed with intelligence. They looked around, and very soon their vision extended until they could see everything that was in the world. Immediately they gave thanks to the Creators and the Shaper. They said: “We spoke, we thought, we felt, and we know what is close and far away; we see the great and the small in the Sky and the Earth.”

The Makers and the Shapers did not like what they heard from their creatures. The First Fathers said: “What our creation says is not good. What if they become more than creatures, perhaps even gods like us?” So they met in Council to discuss the future of their creatures. They had started to fear what would happen if these creatures did not multiply, if they did not reproduce by the time the Sun went down. Over and over again the gods discussed all this, until they decided to fill the dreams of the humans and to veil their eyes so that they would be permitted to see only that which was a short distance away. In this way the wisdom of the origin of the Quiché race was suppressed. The Creators and the Makers created women, and when the men awoke from their dream, their hearts were filled with joy, thanks to their wives.[4]

The Destruction of the False Principal Macaw at the Hands of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer[5]

When the Sun had not yet come up above the surface of the Earth there was already one known as Principal Macaw, who boasted of his power and virtues. Principal Macaw told the story of those who had perished in the floods of water and from the dark, resinous substance that fell from the skies.[6]

For a long time the men had to walk through unknown places, fleeing the cold and searching for food.[7]

They had fire, but when it went out they had to create it anew by rubbing sticks together. At the beginning they found themselves by the sea, and in the intense cold they walked upon it, until they reached other lands. Neither the Sun nor the Moon could be seen. Over time the tribes became separated. And now, when one group met another, they could no longer understand each other. It was the time in which they searched for the Sun that warms the forests and the animals. There were no houses, and only the skins of beasts for clothing. But when the first inhabitants arrived in the lands full of forests and rivers and volcanoes, Principal Macaw wanted them to believe that he was the Sun and the wealth, and that it was to him that men owed their obedience.

Two gods were engendered; they were called Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer. They found Principal Macaw when he had climbed a tree to eat of its fruit. Without being seen, Master Wizard drew as near as was prudent. Aiming his blowgun at Principal Macaw, at the opportune moment Master Wizard shot a dart into his jaw. The unhappy Principal Macaw fell to the ground with his voice screaming in his throat.

Master Wizard ran up with the intention of killing Principal Macaw. But when he got there, Master Wizard was grabbed and violently shaken, until Principal Macaw was able to rip out one of Master Wizard’s arms and run away with it. Reaching his house, Principal Macaw put the arm into the fire so that its owner would have to search for it. Meanwhile, the two who had been engendered left in search of their grandfather, the Great Boar of the Dawn, and their grandmother, the Tapir of the Dawn, and with them formed a scheme.

Becoming two children, the two who had been engendered accompanied their grandparents to the house of Principal Macaw. Seeing them arrive, chief Macaw, completely exhausted by the

pain in his jaw, went to the strangers, asking if they could cure it. They answered, saying that they were expert in that art, and with these assurances they put their hands on the bloodstained face of chief Macaw. While he groaned, the visitors tightly bound his head, neck, arms, and legs. Then they began to skin him. Skinning him completely, they removed his precious stones and the resplendent metal of which he boasted so much. So died Principal Macaw at the hands of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer. Then these two went and recovered the arm, which finally fit perfectly back into the body of its owner.

The two who had been engendered went swiftly, then, to carry out the command they had been given by the powers of the Sky—the Words of the Sky, who are: Giant Master (Lightning), Mark of the Lightning, and Splendor of the Lightning. Those great forces of the Sky had also ordered them to destroy the two children of Principal Macaw: a son called Wise Earth-Fish and another called Giant of the Earth. These two ravaged life, and were killed by those who were engendered. So it was that their works were many, but they still had not been able to contain evil in its territory, because it was scattered far and wide and mixed with all the things.

The Ball Game in the Hells: Descent, Death, Resurrection, and Ascent of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer

The Kingdom of Xibalbá is a subterranean world in which resides all the harm that humanity suffers. From it arise illnesses, rancor, and fratricidal strife. And to that place are dragged only those who have done evil—although before Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer, all humans were taken down to Xibalbá, not only those who were evil. Now, there came a time when the parents of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer, called Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Magician, walked upon the surface of the world. When they took from those of Xibalbá their shields of leather, their rings, their gloves, their crowns, their helmets, and their ball, those-from-below were greatly offended. When the parents of Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer played with the ball during the game, they made the Earth tremble, and all of Xibalbá would grow angry. Finally, one day, those-from-below sent their ambassadors with the proposal to settle the dispute with a game of ball. But those of Xibalbá betrayed and sacrificed the parents, and this insult to the Sky remained unavenged.

Now Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer were happy because the Sky sent them to play ball above the heads of those of Xibalbá. Those who were engendered swept and arranged the space so that they might finally begin to play ball. Then, those-from-below said: “Those who play above our heads and make the Earth tremble, are they not the children of Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Magician? Are they not the children of those we sacrificed?” Thus they said, and agreed to call upon these disruptive ones. They sent ambassadors to those who were engendered, with instructions that Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer appear before them. “They must come here, because we wish to play ball with them. In seven days we shall play.”

Receiving the message, Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer remembered how those of Xibalbá had betrayed the Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Magician. And so they accepted the challenge, and descended into the underground world. They went down the steep slope, passing beyond the charmed rivers and the ravines. They arrived at the crossroads of the damned and continued on to the place where those of Xibalbá were. The leaders had put wooden puppets in their places so that no one could see their true faces (they also hid their names to have greater effect). But the visitors, who knew all this, said: “Greetings to you, Supreme Death; greetings to you, Principal Death; greetings to you, Prostrate Cripple; greetings

to you, Blood Gatherer; greetings to you, Abscess Master; greetings to you, Jaundice Master; greetings to you, Bone Scepter; greetings to you, Skull Scepter; greetings to you, Blood Hawk; greetings to you, Bloody Teeth; greetings to you, Bloody Claws." And they discovered the faces of all of them and named all of their names—not forgetting one—and with that, all of the concealments practiced by those of Xibalbá lost their power.

The chiefs, grumbling, invited Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer to sit down on a bench, but they refused because it was really a burning rock. And so those of Xibalbá offered them rooms in the Dark Mansion and gave them pine torches so that they could see and tobacco so that they could smoke. Later that night those of Xibalbá went to look for them so that they might play ball, and those who were engendered won the contest against those of Xibalbá. So, the chiefs sent them to rest at the Mansion of Obsidian, which was swarming with warriors, but they left uninjured and ready for a new game of ball. Again Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer won. They were rewarded with a rest in the Mansion of Incalculable Cold, to which, as homage, dense hail was added. Departing from there, Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer went to the Mansion of Jaguars, from which even ferocious beasts fled in fear. So that they might play ball, in the same way they were sent to the Mansion of Fire, and then to the Mansion of Bats. In the end, the games concluded with the defeat of Xibalbá.

Then the chiefs ordered that a burning cooking stone be erected, and they requested that those who were engendered demonstrate their power by throwing themselves upon it. They did as they were asked and were burned, until all that was left was their white bones. And then those of Xibalbá cried out: "We have defeated them!" Then those of Xibalbá ground up their bones and scattered them over the river. But the following day, those who had been engendered returned in the form of two very poor men, who danced at the gates of Xibalbá. Taken before the chiefs, the beggars demonstrated many remarkable wonders. They would set something on fire and then restore it; they would destroy a thing, which would then reassemble itself. Excited by this magic, the chiefs asked: "Kill someone and then revive him." And so they did. Then the chiefs said: "Now dismember yourselves, and then rejoin your parts." And so they did.

Witnessing these wonders, Supreme Death and Principal Death asked: "Sacrifice and then revive us." And in this way Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer sacrificed Supreme Death and Principal Death—but they did not revive them. Great was the confusion among those of Xibalbá upon seeing their supreme leaders split open, with their hearts removed. When those who were engendered split the chiefs in two, their followers fled, but all of them were captured and themselves cut in two. All of their children were led to a precipice, and all of them were used to fill in the abyss. There the lifeless bodies of those of Xibalbá remained. By these great wonders, by the metamorphosis of those who were engendered, were conquered those of Xibalbá.

Those who were engendered made their true names known and proclaimed that their parents, Supreme Master Wizard and Principal Master Sorcerer, had been avenged. Sealing off the hells, those who were engendered said: "The glory of Xibalbá no longer exists, but nevertheless we leave you dominion over the wicked. You shall have dominion over those of War, of Sadness, of Misery. But you will no longer ensnare the Children of the Dawn, nor will you seize men by surprise, as happened when Xibalbá dominated the world." Then Master Wizard and Little Sorcerer addressed their parents, who in earlier times had been sacrificed in Xibalbá, saying: "We have avenged your torture and your death." Then, enveloped in light, they rose up to the highest heavens, where they became the Sun and the Moon and illuminated the face of the Earth, dispelling the darkness that had reigned until then.

Notes to Universal Root Myths

I. Sumerian-Akkadian Myths

[1] In this retelling of the myth of Gilgamesh we have kept in mind the twelve Assyrian tablets, which are a compilation of earlier Akkadian ones, derived in turn from the Sumerian, as recent discoveries demonstrate. We have based our approach on a number of works, including R. Campbell Thompson's translations of the original material, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), and those of G. Contenau in *L' Epopée de Gilgamesh* (Paris: L'Artisan du livre, 1939). We have also consulted the works of Speiser, Bauer, Kramer, Heidel, Langdom, Schott, Ungnad, and, finally, G. Blanco's *Cantar de Gilgamesh* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Galerna, 1978).

[2] The poem of Gilgamesh was apparently written toward the end of the third millennium B.C.E., but based on much older material. We are led to agree with this hypothesis on the basis of the history of developments in ceramic technology. In fact, around the time that this tale was written down, history's first potter's wheel had already been invented in Uruk (circa 3500 B.C.E.). The oldest example is an instrument consisting of a ceramic wheel 90 centimeters in diameter and 12 centimeters thick, which was rotated with the left hand while the material was worked with the right. The weight of the flywheel was sufficient for it to continue spinning for a number of minutes, freeing both of the potter's hands to perfect the work. Mesopotamia would later see the invention of the foot-powered wheel.

In the poem, however, the goddess Aruru creates the man of clay using nothing more than her moistened hands. This is a detail of some importance, since one can deduce from this technical description that the myth pertains to a time before the introduction of the potter's wheel. On comparing the Sumerian myth of creation of the human being with its Egyptian equivalent, for example, we see that in the latter case the god Khnum shapes the body out of clay using a potter's wheel (which had recently made its appearance in the Nile region during the Dynastic Era). The Sumerian poem alludes to the creation of the hero Enkidu as a "double," a copy of Gilgamesh, after the goddess Aruru "concentrates within herself." It is possible that this refers to a technique used in the production of ceramic human figures involving the making of copies through the use of molds (i.e., "within herself") based on a previously manufactured original. The fact that Enkidu is born covered with hair ("the hero was born with his body covered with hair as thick as the barley of the fields") could refer to the visible presence of materials added to reduce plasticity (cereal cuttings, straw, and so on), which were added to the clay to prevent it from cracking, as is still done in some areas where clay is used to prepare adobe. All of this technology corresponds to a stage previous to that of industrial ceramics and the use of the potter's wheel. Thus, the story predates the epoch of al'Ubaid and originates long before the appearance of the myth of Marduk, in which Marduk wishes to create man out of his blood and bones, although he later decides to do so with the blood of his enemy, Kingu. In this case, we are already in the presence of engobe, or glazed ceramics, of which there are numerous Babylonian examples from that period. Moreover, the British Museum contains a tablet on which a formula for enamel appears, based on lead and copper, from the Babylonian master Liballit, possibly contemporaneous with the writing of the myth of Marduk.

It could be objected that in the Hebrew Genesis, as in the Quiché *Popol Vuh,* there is no reference to the potter's wheel, even though it is a technology that already existed by the time of their respective compositions. As for Genesis, God creates Adam from clay, and later creates Eve from his rib (as in the case of Marduk, from blood and bone), and gives Adam life by blowing into him with his breath. There is no reference to the wheel, but the "blowing" is suggestive because the use of a

mechanism for introducing air into a furnace predates the potter's wheel. It is a procedure that was then perfected with the bellows, allowing temperatures above 800 degrees C. to be reached, something not otherwise possible given the caloric content of the resins in the firewood of that region. It should also be noted that the invention of the convection furnace at times allowed temperatures of as much as 1,000 degrees C. to be reached, although air injection is an advance based on earlier techniques.

Among the Quiché it was said that the gods made the first man from mud. But over time the first man fell apart (it being a pre-ceramic time of dried clay); then the gods made man from wood, but this did not work either, and this version of humanity was in turn destroyed. And finally the gods made the human being from corn. This indicates that the origin of the myth can be fixed in the stage of Neolithic tools (stone, bone, and wood)—that is, prior to the ceramic revolution. On the other hand, neither the wheel nor the potter's lathe was known in the Americas, and hence there are no references to those technologies. It is true that the three classical translations of the *Popul Vuh* (Arciniegas, Recinos, and Chavez) contain descriptions of potter's tools and ceramic technology coexistent with the myth of the creation of the human being, but this only indicates that these technologies existed before the text itself was finalized.

In synthesis, the Sumerian myth presents us with the oldest example of the creation of the human being by a potter-god. Nonetheless, uncertainties about the dating of certain ceramics based on their firing temperatures could cast some doubt on these conclusions. Fortunately, many problems of this type have been resolved, beginning with Wedgwood's work on Etruscan vases. The pyrometer designed by this researcher (notwithstanding imperfections in its scale) allowed the amount of heat absorbed by a specific clay to be determined. Knowing the composition of a clay and then submitting a replica to controlled firing allowed the degree of contraction to be determined, according to the parameters established in the scale. The criteria indicated that the greater the heat, the greater the contraction, which then remains fixed once the piece has cooled. Another method consisted of submitting a piece of test material to increasing temperatures, up to the point that contraction occurs, and noting at what temperature this happens. Today, technology allows pyrometric analysis of far greater precision, so that it is possible to determine the temperature at which pottery was fired to within one-tenth of a degree.

[3] "The fragments 'The Death of Gilgamesh' and 'The Descent to Hell' come from Sumerian tablets found in Nippur, which have been dated to the first half of the second millennium B.C.E. Although they are not connected to the structure of the poem, the second one is found in literal translation in the Assyrian Tablet XII, the most complete and recent version that we have of the poem." *Cantar de Gilgamesh* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Galerna, 1978, p. 95). In A. Schott's translation, the text that appears regarding Enkidu's speech to Gilgamesh is as follows: "Look, my body, which you held with tenderness—vermin now gnaw away like old clothes. Yes, my body, which you touched with joy, is invaded by decay, becoming filled with the dust of the Earth!… Have you seen one who died, burned in combat? I certainly have—he was in the silent night, reclining on his bed and drinking pure water. Have you seen someone fall in battle? I certainly have—his dear parents cradle his head and his wife leans over him. Have you seen someone whose remains were discarded on the steppe? O poor me! I have seen him also—he finds no peace. Have you seen someone whose soul is cared for by no one? I have seen it—from nothing more than leftovers in the pot and crumbs by the road must he eat." *El país de los sumerios,* H. Schmökel (Buenos Aires: Ed. Eudeba, 1984, p. 210).

[4] The vision of a jeweled Paradise is usually linked to wisdom, and at times to eternal life. In the latter case, guardians—frequently serpents, as in a Cretan myth cited by Apollodorus—often defend the city. In that tale, the serpents possess the herb of immortality, whereas in the Gilgamesh myth the serpent steals the plant of life that the hero already possesses.

These themes have been the subject of interpretations ranging from the extremely spiritual to the crudest positivism. Here is one example: "…the celestial paradise is enjoyed in a schizophrenic

trance, induced either by asceticism, by glandular disturbance, or by use of hallucinogenic drugs. It is not always possible to judge which of these causes produced the mystic visions of, say, Ezekiel, 'Enoch,' Jacob Boehme, Thomas Traherne, or William Blake. Yet, jeweled gardens of delight are commonly connected in myth to the eating of an ambrosia forbidden to mortals; and this points to a hallucinogenic drug reserved for a small circle of adepts, which gives them sensations of divine glory and wisdom. The Gilgamesh reference to buckthorn [espino cerva] must be a blind, however—buckthorn was eaten by ancient mystics not as an illuminant but as a preliminary purgative.… All gardens of delight are originally ruled by goddesses; upon the change from matriarchy to patriarchy, male gods usurp them.… The jeweled Sumerian paradise to which Gilgamesh went was owned by Siduri, Goddess of Wisdom, who had made the Sun-god Shamash its guardian; in later versions of the epic, Shamash has degraded Siduri to a mere 'ale-wife' serving at a near-by tavern." *Hebrew Myths, The Book of Genesis,* R. Graves and R. Patai (New York: Doubleday, 1964, p. 80).

As for the relationship among immortality, serpents, and the act of theft, Wilkins in his *Hindu Mythology* observes how Garuda brought a bit of amrita (ambrosia) from the Moon for the Nagas, or serpent deities, as the price to free his mother from slavery. Indra tried to persuade Garuda to give him the amrita so that the Nagas would not become immortal. But Garuda did not change his mind, and instead handed a vessel containing the substance to the abductors. However, Indra stole it while the Nagas were bathing. The Nagas, believing that the ambrosia must have spilled onto the Kusa herb (*Poa Cynosuroides*), licked the plant. The herb's sharp thorns ripped their tongues, and so it is that the serpent has a forked tongue. *Hindu Mythology–Vedic and Puranic,* W. J. Wilkins (London: Curzon, 1973).

[5] From the fragment called "The Death of Gilgamesh."

II. Assyro-Babylonian Myths

[1] The poem, written in Babylon based on Sumerian material, was later found in the royal library of Assurbanipal (seventh century B.C.E.).

[2] The eleven monsters and their chief, Kingu, are the twelve constellations of the zodiac that Marduk will place in the sky like statues (fixed images).

[3] A reference to the Enuma Elish–Tablet I (When On High), v. 147 to 157. See, e.g., *Poema Babilónico de la Creación,* E. L. Peinado and M. G. Cordero (Madrid: Ed. Nacional, 1981, p. 98). The translators of this work have also consulted works including Enuma Elish–Tablet I in *The Babylonian Genesis,* A. Heidel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 24).

[4] Tablet 3, v. 134–38. Tablet 4, v. 1–32.

[5] The plant associated with Tiamat and Kingu could be a member of an aquatic species with poisonous qualities that, in small doses, could also have curative powers (i.e., the "blood" of Kingu as a giver of life). Such apparently contradictory ideas are not unheard of. In Pausanias 8, 17, 6 ss, we read that the water of the Styx had pernicious properties, destroying iron, metal, and ceramics. At the same time, these waters also possessed the quality of an "elixir of life," as can be seen in the case of Achilles, who is made invulnerable by his immersion in them. As we read in Hesiod: "Such is the oath the gods made of the primeval and immortal water of the Styx, which never fails, but leaps forth from the rocks." *Theogony,* v. 805.

[6] The Zodiac.

[7] The Sun.

[8] The star Sirius.

[9] The planet Jupiter.

[10] Tablet 5, v. 14–22.

[11] Bab-El, meaning "Door of God."

[12] Tablet 6, v. 5–10. The Iggi and the Anunnaki, entities of the heavens and the infernal depths, respectively.
[13] Tablet 6, v. 11–16.
[14] Tablet 6, v. 29–37. The blood released through the sacrifice of Kingu cleanses the gods of their guilt, and allows the transmission of life to humanity. Perhaps the phrase “in an incomprehensible act” reveals the perplexed state of the Babylonian poet (or the lack of evidence) in the face of an unsatisfactory explanation—an explanation that at one time may have made sense in a more complete Sumerian context (from which the myth derives). In the Chaldean tradition, Marduk and Aruru were the ancestors of man. In the poem of Gilgamesh, by moistening her hands and molding clay, the goddess creates humankind—just as she later creates Enkidu, the king’s double. Another version (transmitted by the priest Berossus) has humanity modeled from clay, with which the blood of a god was mixed.
[15] This refers to the truncated, stepped pyramid (ziggurat), at whose apex always stood a small temple that was also an astronomical observatory. The Esagila complex included other towers, residences, and fortified walls in which ramps were frequently used in place of steps. In the underground spaces of the pyramid, funeral or ritual chambers were found in which Marduk “rested” or “died” for the New Year festivities (Akitu). Afterward, he would be rescued from the “mountain of death,” and through complex ceremonies, the destinies of the New Year would be set.

Of course, the myth of death and resurrection had already taken shape much earlier in Sumer. On this matter, Schmökel comments: “Today we know that the problem of life, death, and resurrection, expressed in the mystery of Inanna and Dumuzi, was a core problem in the ancient Sumerian religion.… We must ask if the somber description of the beyond in the epic of Gilgamesh should not be considered a reaction against hopes that were too effusive in that regard. All those who committed themselves wholly to faith in the giver of life—Inanna and her lover Dumuzi, who annually in the autumn would descend to the netherworld accompanied by the lamentations of mankind, and then be joyously received upon his return the following spring—could perhaps participate in that return, and themselves become a link in the eternal chain of death and rebirth.… And we have already seen that, at least in the first dynasty of Ur, the belief in the king as Dumuzi gave rise to the strangest events: whole groups of men would take hemlock in the tomb of the dead sovereign or deceased priestess in order to accompany their god and arise again with him. We will leave aside the question of the degree of spontaneity in such cases—the fact that those men and women put an end to their lives without any visible coercion appears certain.” *El País de los Sumerios,* H. Schmökel (Ed. Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 1984, p. 210).
[16] Tablet 6, v. 95–98. A possible reference to the Flood.
[17] Tablet 6, v. 120–23. “Black heads” is a designation given to human beings. In any case, reducing the many names of Marduk reveals the monotheistic aspect of Babylonian religion following the expansion of this local divinity throughout Lower and Upper Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and the eastern Mediterranean. The Assyrians would proceed in the same way with Assur.
[18] Tablet 7, v. 161–62. This refers to the final words of Enuma Elish.

III. Egyptian Myths

[1] The form that we have given to this creation story corresponds to the mythology of Memphis and the basalt inscription that Pharaoh Shabaka had engraved in approximately 700 B.C.E. This inscription had in turn been transcribed from a papyrus of a considerably older date. Atum was the principal god during the time of the Old Kingdom, although occasionally he was linked to Ra, the solar disc. In the New Kingdom, Ra came to occupy the central position at the expense of Atum and the other gods. The sources on which we are drawing show Ptah as the creator of all that exists, but in Egyptian mythology there are always difficulties in following the process of transformation of a

divine entity. Very often, a god that is totally unknown in one era will begin to take the first tentative steps onto the historical stage in subsequent eras. Later, this figure may even develop to the point where it threatens to absorb all religious or mythic life for an extended period. Egypt, with its long cultural history, is rich with examples of this kind. According to the *Aegyptiaca* (referred to by Flavius Josephus), the first dynasty began around 3000 B.C.E. (during the time that the capital was in Tinis). Up until the time of Persian, Greek, and Roman domination, Egypt remained active, and hence openly in transformation. Even during the Ptolemaic era, Egyptian mythology continued developing new forms that influenced the Hellenistic world, just as it had influenced the beginnings of Greek culture in earlier times. We are speaking, therefore, of some 3,000 years of continuous development, and it is clear that a great deal of confusion could be occasioned by the appearance and transformation of myths over such an extended period of time. So it is that over the course of a millennium or more, a given divinity can take on different—and at times even opposing—characteristics.

[2] Both the not-yet-born and the already-dead coexist in the present of Ptah.

[3] One legend specifically mentions Byblos. Phoenicia was a region of Asia Minor on the west coast of Syria that extended from Lebanon to the Mediterranean, and as far south as Mount Carmel. Its principal cities were Byblos, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, and Acca. During the period of Roman domination, the territory of Celesyria (or Phoenicia of Lebanon) was included, and the ancient nation was designated as Maritime Phoenicia. We have used Phoenicia in the story to highlight the root "Phoenix"—the fabled bird that died in fire and was reborn from its own ashes. In any case, we should not overlook that in fact "Phoenicia" comes from the Greek "Phoenikia," that is, "country of palm trees," and that the inhabitants of that place called themselves "Canaanites" and not "Phoenicians."

[4] This is an allusion to the preparation of a mummy, as related by Herodotus (*Histories,* Book 2, 86ff.).

[5] Some have sought to derive the word "pyramid" from the Greek term meaning "wheat cake," arguing that the Egyptians and Greeks prepared certain pastries in that shape. It has also been maintained that these pastries perhaps derived in turn from others that were used in ceremonial theophagic practices. However, still others hold that they were merely artfully adorned foodstuffs.

Pyramid, from the Greek *pyramis,* has the same root as pira—pyra—and as fire—pyr. "Pira" has been used for the pyres upon which the bodies of the dead or ritual sacrifices are burned. We do not have the exact word in the ancient Egyptian language that refers to a pyramid in a geometric sense. In any case, the Greek name for that body and the initial mathematical studies regarding it could well have derived from Egyptian teaching, as Plato maintains in the *Timaeus* where he deals with the earliest scientific knowledge his people had as being Egyptian in origin. These considerations have allowed a play on words in which the term "pyramid" is in the end identified with the potter's kiln.

For his part, Herodotus (*Histories,* 2, C and C1) tells a story regarding the motivation for the building of the pyramids, connecting it to the theme of Osiris. Given a reasonable degree of license, we feel that the composition of the paragraph on which we are commenting is acceptable, especially bearing in mind the antiquity of the myth proper to primitive ceramic culture (in which the rebirth of man is brought about by the potter-god). As for the Mesopotamian pyramids (ziggurats), they lead us to consider the idea that these constructions were not only temples and astronomical observatories but also the "sacred mountains" in which Marduk was buried and from where he later resurrected. As for the step and covered or semi-covered pyramids of Mexico and Central America (e.g., Xochicalco, Chichen Itza, Cholula, Teotihuacan), we have no data that would lead us to state that they functioned as sepulchers or filled any function beyond being cultic constructions and serving as astronomical observatories. As for the historical development of the Egyptian pyramids, they evolved from the mastabas, which by the Third Dynasty were already linked to the cult of the Sun in Heliopolis.

[6] According to what may be observed, for example, in the *Papyrus of Ani* (Brit. Mus. N. 10,470, sheets 3 and 4).
[7] The tall white crown of the Upper Nile and the flat red crown of the Lower Nile represented both the origins of the pharaoh and his power over those regions. At times both crowns were combined to form the double crown. In the period of the New Empire, the blue crown of war came into use. Often, the ureaeus, the sacred cobra, or ostrich feathers were used in conjunction with the tall crown, each of these representing power over both lands. In the case of Osiris, the crown takes on a priestly character, as in a tiara. The same occurs with the papal headdress (in which, instead, the three-tiered crown can be observed). In this case, the pontifical tiara can be seen to derive from the miter of the bishops, though its style is somewhat more Egyptian.
[8] The whip and the crook or staff frequently appear crossed over the chest of the pharaohs. In the representations of Osiris they serve a priestly function, in the same way as the crooked staff of the Christian bishops.
[9] Ka was not the spirit but rather the vehicle that visited the mummified corpse. It had some physical properties, and as it appears in the various epochs of the *Book of the Dead* was represented as a "double." When the Ka of the pharaoh was represented, it was usually by two identical painted or sculpted figures holding hands.
[10] The equal-armed cross was the Chaldeo-Babylonian symbol of Anu. The Ankh cross or *crux ansata* was a Tau with a circle and a handle, a symbol of triumph over death and the attribute of Sekhet. This cross was later adopted by the Coptic Christians.
[11] Ba was the spirit, not subject to material vicissitudes. It was normally represented as a bird with a human face.
[12] Amenti was hell, the kingdom of the dead.
[13] Khnum, often represented with a human body and a ram's head, was the main divinity of the Elephantine Triad of Upper Egypt. This divinity made the bodies of humans from clay, forming them on his potter's wheel. In its spinning, this wheel acts like the wheel of fortune, determining the destiny of each person from the moment of their birth. Beltz (citing E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el-Bahri, 2*, tables 47–52) has Khnum speaking these words as he creates an important queen: "I wish to give you the body of a goddess, perfect like all the gods. You will receive from me not only happiness and health but the crown of both countries. You are at the summit of all living beings; you who are queen of Upper and Lower Egypt." *Los Mitos Egipcios,* W. Beltz (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1986, pp. 97–98).
[14] Thoth, god of Hermopolis and creator of culture, also had the role of the one who guides souls to Amenti. He was usually represented as having a human body and the head of an ibis. His equivalence to the Greek Hermes gave rise to the figure of Hermes-Thoth. Later, around the third century C.E., the neoplatonists and other gnostic sects produced the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*Pymander, The Key, Asclepius, The Emerald Tablet,* and so on), which they attributed to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus (the "thrice-great"), the creator of science, the arts, and law.
[15] The sycamore was a type of fig tree with extremely durable wood that was used to make sarcophagi. An allusion is also made here to the Djed tree, which represented the resurrection of Osiris—new shoots springing from its dead trunk.
[16] "Lady of the West" is the name the goddess-mother Hathor would take in funerary invocations. She lived in the western region of Libya where the kingdom of the dead was located.
[17] Anubis, with the body of a man and the head of a jackal, was the accuser in the judgment of the dead. At times he was known as the "Embalmer" or "Guardian of the Tombs." Anubis was said to have helped in the embalming of Osiris. He also appeared as "the One Who Is on His Mountain," that is, in charge of the funerary pyramid.

[18] The amulets (ushabtis, or “those who answer”) were clay figurines placed in the tombs to accompany the dead to the land of Amenti, where they would acquire human size and characteristics, carrying out the more onerous labors on behalf of the deceased.
[19] Horus, with his parents Osiris and Isis, formed part of the trinity of Abydos. In his aspect as the rising sun he was represented with the head of a falcon and a solar disc on his forehead.
[20] A local god of Coptos and certain desert regions. Represented with an erect phallus like Priapus, he was a divinity of regeneration in the court of Seth. Called “Bull of his Mother,” he was both the son and the husband of a divinity that presided over the East. At some point there may have been intermixture between Seth and Min, since some legends present Seth as a black bull, assassinating Osiris. On the other hand, the very ancient Min may in fact be closely related to the legendary Minos of Crete, also represented as a bull.
[21] Apophis was a monstrous serpent that lay in wait for the ship of the Sun. Over time, he became identified with Seth in his demonic aspect. In the *Book of the Dead,* invocations are made to ensure that this serpent does not destroy the ship, which carries the deceased.
[22] The loss of a god’s head indicates not death but rather a replacement of attributes. Thus, many divinities can easily be identified thanks to the fact that the head they bear is the totem of their people or the place from which they came.
[23] We have thought it important to make note of the history of Akhenaton under a subtitle that refers to its quality as an “antimyth.” In reality, we are dealing with another root myth: that of the one god, who, as a system of thought, clashes strongly with those overpopulated pantheons. Although there were already monotheistic proposals in Mesopotamia, it is in Egypt and with Akhenaton (1364–1347 B.C.E.) that this particular religious form gains strength. Akhenaton’s reform lasts only as long as his reign, however. According to Beltz, the priestly castes that granted an honorific primacy to the clergy of Amon of Thebes often saw themselves as both the treasure and the safeguard of national traditions. Their successful resistance to Akhenaton’s reforms had not only a religious but a national character as well. After they had annulled the reforms of this heretical sovereign, their influence and power became stronger than ever. According to Tokarev, “The temples became the greatest economic power of the country. The kings of the Twentieth Dynasty were puppets in the hands of the Theban high priests, whose functions were formerly hereditary.” As opposed to Christianity and Islam—religions that advanced in alliance with the new political forces—Egyptian religion regressed toward autochthonous forms. If Akhenaton’s political and religious reforms had progressed, it is quite probable that a universal religion would have arisen much earlier than those known today. In any case, although the traces of heresy were officially erased, its influence transcended the borders of Egypt.
[24] Heliopolis.
[25] The translations of the *Hymn to Aton* are numerous. For this work we have drawn on fragments of diverse translations, modifying them and giving them a unified style.

IV. Hebrew Myths

[1] Genesis 2:9 and 2:16–17.
[2] Based on Book 5 of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost.*
[3] Genesis 3:4–5.
[4] In this story, following the tone of the myth of Gilgamesh—”he who knew all” but who returned to die in Uruk—the serpent is interested in having man acquire knowledge, but impedes him from achieving immortality.
[5] Genesis 3:22–24.
[6] Annunciation of the Laws of Moses.
[7] Genesis 22:1–14.

[8] “God also said to Abraham: ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall be the mother of nations; kings of many peoples shall spring from her.’ Then Abraham threw himself down on his face and laughed, and said to himself, ‘Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’” Genesis, 17:15–18.

[9] “Then the stranger said: ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah had grown very old; Sarah was long past the age of child-bearing. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘Shall I have a child now that I have grown old, and am past child-bearing, and my husband is old?’ The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? In due season I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.’ But Sarah denied this, saying, ‘I did not laugh,’ for she was afraid; but he said, ‘Oh yes, you did laugh.’” Genesis, 18:10–16.

[10] The theme of Abraham was treated dramatically by Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling.* In one of the possible scenarios on the theme of the sacrifice, he writes: “It was early morning. Abraham rose in good time, embraced Sarah, the bride of his old age, and Sarah kissed Isaac, who had taken her disgrace from her, and was her pride and hope for all generations. So they rode on in silence, and Abraham’s eyes were fixed on the ground, until the fourth day when he looked up and saw afar the mountain in Moriah, but he turned his gaze once again to the ground. Silently, he arranged the firewood and bound Isaac; silently he drew the knife. Then he saw the ram that God had appointed. He sacrificed that and returned home.… From that day on, Abraham became old, he could not forget that God had demanded this of him. Isaac throve as before; but Abraham’s eye was darkened, he saw joy no more.” *Fear and Trembling,* S. Kierkegaard (London: Penguin, 1985, p. 46).

For our part, rather than emphasizing guilt as a motif of existence, we have highlighted certain redemptive aspects of the myth that involve divine mockery in the face of the laughter motivated by incredulity.

[11] It is not only Jacob but also Moses who struggles with God. Thus we are told: “During the journey, while they were encamping for the night, the Lord met Moses, meaning to kill him.” Exodus, 4:24.

[12] Israel, that is, “He Who Strives with God,” or “He Whom God Strives With.”

[13] Peniel, that is, “the Face of God.”

[14] “Arabic lexicographers explain that the nature of the lameness produced by injury to the sinew of the thigh socket causes a person so afflicted to walk on the tips of his toes. Such a dislocation of the hip is common among wrestlers, and was first described by Hippocrates. Displacement of the femur-head lengthens the leg, tightens the thigh tendons, and puts the muscles into spasm—which makes for a rolling, swaggering walk, with the heel permanently raised, like that attributed by Homer to the god Hephaestus. A belief that contact with the *jinn* results in a loose-mannered gait, as though disjointed, is found among the Arabs: perhaps a memory of the limping dance performed by devotees who believed themselves divinely possessed, like the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings, 18:26). Beth Hoglah, near Jericho, may have been so called for this reason, because *hajala* in Arabic means to hobble or hop, and both Jerome and Eusebius call Beth Hoglah ‘the place of the ring-dance.’ The Tyrians performed such limping dances in honor of Hercules Melkarth. It is possible, therefore, that the Peniel myth originally accounts for a limping ceremony which commemorated Jacob’s triumphal entry into Canaan after wrestling with a rival.” *Hebrew Myths, The Book of Genesis,* Graves and Patai, p. 229, footnote 7.

[15] The theme of the divine limp is found extensively in universal mythology—from lame Hephaestus, who is thrown from Olympus, to the Terena and other tribal peoples such as those of Vancouver Island. The Ute Indians of Whiterocks in Utah practiced “limping dances,” and this can also be read in the Talmudic text that refers to the dances of abandon celebrated around the second century B.C.E. with the goal of producing rain. The idea of the divine limp also appears in ancient China. The

founder of the Yin Dynasty, T'ang, who fought against drought, and the Great Yu, founder of the Chang Dynasty, were both hemiplegic and limped. Comments on this detail can be found in Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (4, vol. 7) and in C. Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 460–64). On the point of the limping dances or ecstatic dances carried out with the goal of encouraging rainfall, we believe that the officiant or officiants of the ritual simulate the discomfort of those who complain of arthritic pains when storms approach. In such cases, an attempt is made to "trick" the heavens—and within that logic, if one limps it is because the rains are about to fall, and so it can do nothing else but rain. In the case of Jacob's fight and subsequent limp, we believe that although it may have had to do with a rite, it was related not to the theme of rain but rather to the change of stage of the protagonist. This is confirmed by the transformation of his name into nothing less than that of Israel.

We might also consider the other case mentioned above. In this example of the struggle with Jehovah, Moses is not left lame; however, the fight is followed by the institution of circumcision. Furthermore, all of this occurs upon Moses's return from Egypt, following God's command to rescue his people from Pharaoh's imprisonment. Therefore, the story of the "attempt" by God to "kill" Moses may also reflect a ceremony of change of condition.

[16] We can do no less than transcribe a few paragraphs of Freud's curious study regarding Moses and monotheism. Although his reasoning cannot be completely supported with any historical certainty, nonetheless certain aspects are worth bearing in mind. Of course, we will not reproduce here the psychoanalytic themes of the thesis that appeared under the title *Moses and Monotheism* in *The Origins of Religion: Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works* (see, e.g., London: Penguin, 1990). In the first chapter of this somewhat dated work, Freud attempts to prove that Moses was an Egyptian, and as proof cites a document of Sargon of Agade (founder of Babylon, circa 2800 B.C.E.) in which there appears a version of the story of a "rescue from the water" that was circulating throughout the entire cultural world of Mesopotamia at that time, and hence became known to the Semites born in Babylon or, like Abraham, born in Ur of Chaldea.

The text says: "Sargon, the mighty King, the King of Agade am I. My mother was a Vestal, my father I knew not, while my father's brother dwelt in the mountains. In my city, Azupirani, which lies on the bank of the Euphrates, my mother, the Vestal, conceived me. Secretly she bore me. She laid me in a coffer made of reeds, closed the cover with pitch, and let me down into the river, which did not drown me. The river carried me to Akki, the drawer of water. Akki, the drawer of water, lifted me out in the kindness of his heart. Akki, the drawer of water, brought me up as his own son."

Subsequently (p. 301ff.) Freud says: "…the Aten religion was abolished, the capital city of the Pharaoh, who was branded as a criminal, was destroyed and plundered. In about 1350 B.C.E. the Eighteenth Dynasty came to an end; after a period of anarchy, order was restored by general Haremhab, who reigned until 1315 B.C.E. Akhenaton's reform seemed to be an episode doomed to be forgotten. To this point we have been dealing with what is established historically, and now 'our' hypothetical sequel begins.

"Among those in Akhenaton's entourage there was a man who was perhaps called Tuthmosis, like many other people at that time—the name is not of great importance except that its second component must have been '-mose.' He was in a high position and a convinced adherent of the Aten religion, but, in contrast to the meditative king, he was energetic and passionate. For him the death of Akhenaton and the abolition of his religion meant the end of all his expectations.… Under the necessity of his disappointment and loneliness he turned to these foreigners and with them sought compensation for his losses. He chose them as his people and tried to realize his ideals in them. After he had left Egypt with them, accompanied by his followers, he made them holy by the mark of circumcision, gave them laws and introduced them into the doctrines of the Aten religion, which the Egyptians had just thrown off."

As for circumcision, we know that this was already an established rite in Egypt prior to Moses. And its use by various peoples can be historically confirmed even before its use by the Egyptians, so that it cannot be said to derive solely from them. That Moses could have been Egyptian does not strike us as especially important. The point of interest, rather, is that Egyptian cultural influence made itself felt in that part of the Jewish people who settled in the land of the pharaohs. The events set in motion by Akhenaton took place very close in time to the Exodus, and the religious theses espoused by Moses had much in common with those of the Egyptian reformer.

As for Freud's historical interests, we must remember that around 1934 numerous hypotheses were circulating regarding the Egyptian origin of Moses, among them those of James Breasted and Edward Meyer, whom Freud often cites, echoing their discussion of the theme. Of course, from the time of *Totem and Taboo* in 1913, Freud was not indifferent to the theme of the foundations of religion. When *Moses and Monotheism* concludes that Moses was assassinated by a group of his own followers, neither the antecedents to the case nor the father–son relationship can be overlooked, at least not within the logic of psychoanalysis or that of the anthropological tradition represented by J. G. Frazer, to whom Freud was so indebted. Frazer held that the assassination of the leaders was a tendency that could be either manifest or hidden, but one that existed in many societies. As leaders know or intuit, the people must both care for them and guard against them—*"He must not only be guarded, he must also be guarded against."*

[17] Exodus 3:2–16. See also Exodus 6:2–3.

[18] Exodus, 12:37–38.

[19] According to Eusebius and Julius Africanus, Amenhotep had a canal built, which, beginning in the Nile at Coptos, below Thebes, passed through Cosseir on the Red Sea. This canal was closed during the invasion of Cambyses. Aristotle comments that either Ramses II or Sesostris opened a canal through the isthmus. The work was interrupted and then later continued by Necho, until finally it was finished by Darius. The canal started in Patumos on the Red Sea and ended in the Nile near Bubastis. The Ptolemies improved it, and Strabo describes seeing it in operation. The Romans maintained this canal for a century and a half following the Arab conquest. Apparently, the canal was blocked and then rebuilt by Omar. It remained navigable up to C.E. 765 at which time El-Mansur decided to close it to prevent Mohamed-ben-Abula from receiving provisions from his rebel companions (for more details on Egyptian canals see, e.g., *Rompimiento del Istmo de Suez* by C. S. Montesinos). Regarding the passage of the Israelites through a dry part of the Red Sea, despite the sparse historical data on this question, everything points to the existence of a system of sluices in a branch connected to the Nile—or at least indicates that excavation was in progress on two dry sectors that were later to have been connected by water. If this was the case, provisional containment walls would allow the canal work to proceed. It is thus possible that a heavily weighted Egyptian unit passing along one of those walls might well have caused it to collapse. If this explanation seems less than credible, we should remember the indirect route at one time planned for the Suez Canal, as described by Stephenson, Negrelli, and Paulin Talabot. According to that scheme, known as the Linant-Bey plan, twenty-four sluices were to be built connecting the Red Sea to the Nile. Furthermore, at the official opening of the Suez Canal on November 17, 1869, there were numerous sections that were barely twenty-two meters wide and 8.5 to 9 meters deep. We are not speaking, then, of a canal of vast dimensions or sluices of great height.

[20] "When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. This is why it was called Marah." Exodus 15:23.

[21] "The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." Exodus, 16:31. Here "manna" means "What is this?"—a reference to the surprise expressed by the Israelites upon eating the seeds that Moses gave to them.

[22] Exodus 19:18–21.

[23] Exodus 20:18.

[24] Deuteronomy 33:4–7.
[25] Deuteronomy 33:10–12.

V. Chinese Myths

[1] The doctrine of the Tao is much older than either Lao Tsu or Confucius (both of whom lived in the sixth century B.C.E.). The rudiments of these ideas existed in the origin of the Huang Ho culture. Moreover, important antecedents to the development of Confucianism and Taoism can be found in *The I Ching: The Book of Changes* (possibly pre-tenth century B.C.E.). The *I Ching* is at times attributed to the legendary Fu Hsi; at other times to Wen, founder of the Chou Dynasty; and sometimes to a succession of authors and editors. What is clear, however, is that it has had enormous influence on the formation of numerous schools of thought, as well as giving rise to a series of divinatory techniques and other superstitions that still exist today.
[2] Reference to the *Tao Te Ching.*
[3] This is an allusion to chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching.* In the Chinese-English translation by Lin Yutang (from which it was translated into Spanish by A. Whitelow), we can read: “Thirty spokes are united around the hub; the usefulness of the wheel comes from its non-existence…”(?) *Sabiduría China,* transl. A. Whitelow (Buenos Aires: Nueva, 1945, p. 35).
[4] Profundity in Taoism is considered the infinitely small, and the Profundity of Profundity, the infinite smallness of the infinitely small.
[5] In this free translation, the return to sleep means the contraction or the freezing of all things after the first expansion. The great vortex continues to expand, according to Taoism, but the contraction that balances the universal wave begins in each thing.
[6] *Yin* has been interpreted as a passive force, complementary to *Yang*. Yin, however, appears as a force that is previous to Yang. Associating Yin with the feminine and Yang with the masculine has given rise to a number of anthropological discussions in which it has been argued that this anteriority is historical rather than conceptual. This argument leads to the conclusion that the primacy of the feminine corresponds to a matriarchal epoch that was later displaced by the patriarchy in which Yang asserts its activity, as for example with the Dragon Emperor (Yang) and the Feng Empress (Yin).
[7] This is an allusion to the myths of the afterlife. In the fragment included below, we find reflected various popular beliefs about the afterlife, although they are drawn from different epochs. For example, consider the case of the Eight Immortals that only appears in the thirteenth century C.E. (Yuan Dynasty), alongside figures that were feared or venerated anywhere from the eleventh to the second centuries B.C.E. (the classical period of the Chou Dynasty). In any case, this is a work of great merit that also gives certain ritual rules: “Do you know what they will do with you?” asked Tcheng-Kuang, looking at him attentively. “They will skin you alive, they will tear out your nails, your teeth, and your eyes, they will strip off your flesh and throw it to the vultures. Then dogs will gnaw your bones. And during the one hundred and five days of the Yin solstice, your relatives will not be able to visit your tomb and offer you the sacrifices of the festival of death. The young men of your village will throw their kites—illustrated with the legends of the Eight Immortal Sages—into the air. From these kites they will hang their bells and lanterns. Millions of lanterns will be lit that day in China, but none will be lit for you.… Nor will they burn sulfur or the leaves of the artemisa in the middle of the patio to expel the demons. Ching, the great demon who carries the register of Life and Death, will already have written your name on the door of Hell, on the Great Ocean, on the path that leads to the Yellow Fountains, where the dead live.… Sung-Ti, the Infernal Majesty who lives in the palace of the Black Ropes; and the Lord of the Five Senses, Yen-Lo; the terrible and the implacable Ping-Tang, Lord of the Hells; all will one by one make you pass through their torture chambers in an infinite cycle of torments. You will not go to the Kwang Sung Paradise, where the Queen Mother of

the West strolls amid her peach trees, nor will you ever again see the sun, Father Yang, beautiful Raven of Gold, cross the sky in his chariot of flames." See, e.g., *La Flor del Tao,* A. Quiroga (Madrid: Cárcamo, 1982, pp. 13ff., from the bilingual edition).
[8] *Ta Chuan: The Great Treatise.* See, e.g., *I Ching: Disertación de Ta Chuan,* transl. A. Martínez (Quindio, Colombia: Ed. Tao, 1974).
[9] *Tao Te Ching,* op. cit., 71.

VI. Indian Myths

[1] The mystical literature of India is without doubt the most extensive in the world. Moreover, it is rich in extremely interesting scientific, philosophic, and artistic concepts. There have been many attempts to organize that enormous production in a simple way. Following a basic scheme, we can say that the four Vedas were followed by works of exegesis such as the Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads. The oldest substrate of the Vedas can be dated to around the fifteenth century B.C.E. and the Brahmanas to around the sixth century B.C.E., while in general the Aranyakas are more recent, many of them having been first sketched out at almost the same time as the Brahmanas. The Upanishads, the most recent of these writings, are given the name "Vedanta" because they close the Vedic cycle. The Vedic cycle was composed in the language of the invaders of India, today referred to as Indo-European or Indo-Aryan. This language continued to transform over time, until finally being systematized in its classical expression known as Sanskrit. No longer used for secular purposes, today in the East it holds a position similar to that of ancient Greek in the West. According to Max Muller, the Vedas were written between 1200 and 800 B.C.E., the Brahmanas from 800 to 600 B.C.E., and the rest from 600 to 200 B.C.E. We note, however, that there is nothing in these texts that indicates when they were written, and it is clear that they were transmitted orally for many centuries before being written down. As for modern Hindu mythology, we can mention the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata; the Puranas (traditional stories, of which there are eighteen); and the Tantras (there are five major ones). In this first section, which we have called "Fire, Storm, and Exaltation," we have limited ourselves to presenting a loose and abbreviated version of some of the hymns dedicated to the three most important divinities of the Rig Veda. Authors such as Yaska, perhaps one of the oldest authorities in Vedic commentary, consider that Agni, Indra, and Surya (the Sun) constitute the fundamental trilogy of the literary monument that concerns us. It seems, however, that the supplanting of Soma in that trilogy corresponds to an important change in the mythic perspective of later authors with respect to the original Vedic stage.
[2] Fire as the form of Agni. Various kinds of fire are distinguished in Agni: that of the Earth (wildfire, domestic fire, and sacrificial fire), that of the air (thunderbolt and lightning), and that of heaven (the sun). Agni is usually called "eater of wood" or "eater of fat," the latter referring to the sacrificial fat that is spilled over him. He is born by the rubbing together of the two sacred sticks, and has no feet, hands, or head. He does, however, possess numerous tongues and hair of flames. His voice is a crackling. More than 200 hymns of the *Rig Veda* are dedicated to him, and he was also worshipped by the branch of the Aryans that settled in Iran. There he took on great importance in pre-Zarathustran religion, which continued after the reformer and appears even to this day in the religion of the Parsis. With the advance of Islam, the Parsi community in Iran was greatly reduced. The majority settled in Bombay, and their numbers in Iran dwindled to the current approximately 30,000. While Indra absorbed many of his attributes, nonetheless Agni in his sacrificial character continues to be involved with most of the Hindu divinities.
[3] Storm as the form of Indra. Strictly speaking, the image of Indra is the lightning bolt. Here, however, he appears as the guide of the waters after having liberated them with his triumph over Vrta, the female-demon who held them prisoner. Vrta may have been a goddess of the native peoples, against whom the Aryans fought during their invasion of India through the Punjab. Although

the indigenous inhabitants, who were displaced to the south, may have channeled water toward their fields and possessed a more advanced civilization than that of the foreigners, they lacked weapons of iron such as those of the invading hordes. In the *Rig Veda,* the aboriginal inhabitants are called "Dasyu," no doubt a reference to the Dravidian people. We can also see in Indra the god who struggles against drought and liberates the beneficent waters of the sky. Some 200 hymns of the *Rig Veda* are dedicated to this god (one-quarter of the book), demonstrating the importance that he had in those times. Later, as he lost force, other gods absorbed many of his attributes.

[4] Exaltation, as the form of the inebriating god Soma. This drink corresponds to the Haoma of the Aryans who invaded Iran. Even today the characteristics of the Soma-producing plant are the subject of much discussion. It seems possible that over time the drink was obtained from a succession of plants, giving rise to the confusion that has surrounded this theme. According to W. Wilkins in his *Hindu Mythology,* the plant in question is the acidic *Asclepias* of Roxburgh. It grows in the hills of the Punjab, in the Bolan Pass, around Poona, and elsewhere. But by the period in which the *Vishnu Purana* was written, intoxicants were already strictly prohibited, and hence Soma as such was not exalted. In any case, in this text it is loosely related to the moon, and with this the trail is completely lost. According to other authors, the plant is none other than a variety of *Zygophyllaceae*. It could be that what is involved is the seeds of the plant known as Syrian Rue (*Peganum harmala*), which was used by the Mesopotamians, who burnt it as a ceremonial fumigant.

There are also those who see in Soma a fermented, beer-like drink, similar to those consumed by the Indo-Europeans. But the most interesting theory has come from A. Hofmann (the discoverer of LSD). He states that Soma is in reality the fungus *Amanita muscaria*. According to Hofmann, what had been an ethnobotanical enigma for more than 2,000 years was solved in 1968—the year that *Plants of the Gods* was published. In that work (which he wrote in collaboration with R. Evans Schultes), Hofmann claims that the *Amanita* has been known as a hallucinogen since 1730, thanks to the information of a Swedish official who had been imprisoned in Siberia.

This official reported that the shamans there dried it, then added reindeer milk and ingested it. The resulting symptoms are the same as those reported by the native peoples of Lake Superior and other parts of North and Central America, who followed similar practices. It was later confirmed in the laboratory that the active ingredient was not muscarine as had been thought, but rather ibotenic acid. This acid was isolated, and finally the biochemist Takamoto obtained the alkaloid, muscimole. It was known through this investigation that it is in the process of drying the mushroom that the transformation is produced that converts the acid into muscimole.

The Swedish official mentioned earlier supplied another important observation from Russia. Apparently, in certain Siberian tribes the urine of shamans who had previously taken the mushroom was in turn ingested by others, producing effects similar to those displayed earlier by the shaman in trance. The authors of *Plants of the Gods* mention that this was possible because the psychoactive ingredients passed into the urine without being metabolized, or at least in metabolic forms that were still active—something not often found in the hallucinogenic components of plants. And what is more, in the *Vedas* it is mentioned that the urine of some participants in the Soma ceremony was collected in special receptacles, facts that allow us to establish these curious relationships. In India today, urine therapy based on drinking one's own urine while fasting is still practiced. While this is not identical to the case described above, it is a custom that could very well have its earliest roots in the Vedic era of Soma "medicine."

Regarding the *Amanita,* a late twelfth century Roman fresco in the chapel of Plaincourault shows it as the tree of Eden, with the famous serpent coiled around it. As for toxic substances used in religious ceremonies, the Assyrians already knew of *cannabis* in the first millennium B.C.E., and it was of course also used in Tibet and India to the same ends. In his travels, Marco Polo tells of the case of Hasan-al-Sabah, known as the "old man of the mountain," who used *hashish* (from whose

name comes “hashashim” or “ashasin,” which later becomes “assassin”). He claims that Al-Hasan would subject a group of young people to the intoxicant and then send them off against his enemies.

Surely, much of the use of aromatic substances had its origins in the inhalation of the smoke of hallucinogenic plants burnt for ritual purposes. With the observation of their toxic effects, it is possible that over time these plants were replaced by the resins still in use today in the practices of many religions—for example, incense, myrrh, and storax, as well as aromatic woods such as sandalwood. A similar path can be traced in the origin of certain perfumes that have disappeared over time.

As for the extent of use, we can say that out of the enormous number of terrestrial plant species, only some 150 have been used for their hallucinogenic properties. Of these, about 20 were known in the Eastern Hemisphere and 130 in the Western Hemisphere, with a significant number indigenous to Central and North America. In the origins of the universal religions, a few features can be observed that seem to suggest the presence of hallucinogenic substances. It would seem that, given the numerous references found in the *Rig Veda* (some 120 hymns), Soma ranks as the third most important god of Vedic India. And we cannot overlook the fact that in various times and places any number of religious manifestations have been related to the activity of toxic substances. Regarding abnormalities of perception and representation, see, for example, *Contributions to Thought,* “Psychology of the Image—Variations of the Space of Representation in States of Altered Consciousness” in *Silo: Collected Works, Volume I* (San Diego: Latitude Press, 2003).

[5] *Rig Veda* I, 1, 2. An adaptation that draws in part on the translation of F. Villar Liébana (Madrid: Ed. Nacional, 1975).

[6] *Rig Veda* I, 31, 2.

[7] *Rig Veda* I, 36, 14ff.

[8] *Rig Veda* I, 60, 3.

[9] *Rig Veda* I, 78, 2. It is possible that the historical Buddha is descended from a branch of this Gotama family. In the *Rig Veda* the Rahüganas are mentioned as belonging to that group (I, 78, 5).

[10] *Rig Veda* II. 4, 5ff.

[11] *Rig Veda* I, 32, 1ff.

[12] *Rig Veda* III, 48, 1ff.

[13] *Rig Veda* IX, 1, 5ff.

[14] *Rig Veda* IX, 45, 3ff.

[15] *Rig Veda* IX, 48, 3ff.1

[16] *Rig Veda* IX, 50, 1.

[17] *Rig Veda* IX, 57, 1ff.

[18] *Rig Veda* X, 129, 1ff. An adaptation that draws in part on the translation of R. Griffith.

[19] Based on works including W. Wilkins’s translation of the Mahabharata, *Mitología Hindú* (Barcelona: Visión, 1980).

[20] A reference to the teaching of Buddha (500 B.C.E.), according to whose doctrine the human being can be liberated from the wheel of reincarnations and reach Nirvana, a kind of dissolution from the point of view of the sense characteristics that form the “I.” The Buddhist doctrine (strictly speaking a philosophy and not a religion) was gradually converted into a religious belief that in turn gave rise to an abundant mythology.

[21] “Om” is often pronounced at the beginning of prayers and religious ceremonies. Originally, the letters that made up this word (a-u-m) represented the *Vedas.* With time, it came to denote the three principal deities of the Puranic cycle—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

[22] This oration comes from the *Vishnu Purana*. Regarding Brahma’s name, Monier Williams has this to say: “Only a few hymns of the Vedas appear to contain the simple conception of the existence of a divine and omnipresent being. Even in these, the idea of a god present in all of nature is a bit

diffuse and undefined. In the Purusha Sutra of the Rig Veda, the One Spirit is named Purusha. The most common name in the later system is Brahman, neutral (nominative Brahma), from the root *brih,* 'to expand,' denoting the unity of the expansive essence, or the universally diffused substance of the universe.… Brahma is the neutral, being the 'simply infinite being' (the only real and eternal essence) who, when passing to manifested essence, is called Brahma; when it develops itself in the world it is called Vishnu; and when it again dissolves within itself into a single being, it takes the name Shiva; all the remaining and innumerable gods and semi-gods are also new manifestations of the neutral Brahman, who is eternal." *Indian Wisdom,* M. Williams, p. 12. Cited by Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology–Vedic and Puranic*, p. 106.

[23] The title of this section, "The Forms of Beauty and Horror," synthesizes the contradictory sensation that divinities so often present, in which both their dual beneficent and sinister faces can be seen. The first case presented is the transformation of Krishna before the hero Arjuna. The second is that of the radiant Parvati, who is quite capable of destroying a monster, drinking its blood, and devouring its remains—and then, as mild and beautiful as always, returning to the side of her beloved Shiva. Baudelaire, struck by a similar contradictory state provoked within him by his lover, wrote his *Hymn to Beauty,* which could very well be dedicated to those ambivalent gods: "Are you of heaven or the nether world? Charmed Destiny, your pet, attends your walk; you scatter joys and sorrows at your whim, and govern all, and answer no man's call.… Beauty, you walk on corpses, mocking them; Horror is charming as your other gems.… What difference, then, from heaven or from hell? O Beauty, monstrous in simplicity? If eye, smile, step can open me the way to find unknown, sublime Infinity? *Flowers of Evil,* C. Baudelaire, transl. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[24] Arjuna is one of the heroes of the epic *Mahabharata.*

[25] Adapted from *The Bhagavad Gita,* Canto 11, see, e.g., the translation of J. Roviralta Borrell (Mexico City: Diana, 1974). The *Bhagavad Gita* is an episode within the *Mahabharata,* written toward the third century B.C.E.

VII. Persian Myths

[1] Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, lived between approximately 660 and 580 B.C.E. His preaching began in a remote district of eastern Iran. From the religious point of view, he is one of the more important figures because, among other things, his personal existence is as verifiable as that of Mohammed—something that is not the case for many other founders. Although making use of Indo-Iranian and various primitive elements, this prophet initiates a new universal religion that will have a powerful impact on others. His cosmology and cosmogony, his apocalypticism, and his ideas on salvation begin a religious cycle that, together with Isaiah, Malachi, and Daniel (of the Bible), will have enormous influence in wide regions of both the East and the West.

Subsequently, Zoroastrianism, transformed into Mithraism, will advance once again, this time toward Imperial Rome. In fierce competition with Christianity, it will have great influence on this new religion, but even when Christianity imposes itself in alliance with Roman political power, the seeds of Mithraism will grow in the bosom of the Church to the point of being expressed as serious heresies. The same will occur in Iran, where the Muslim invasion will end up eradicating Zoroastrianism almost entirely, but many of its ideas will go on to produce the Shiite heresy within Islam. Once again in the nineteenth century, Ba' and the Bahai faith will arise as yet another transformation of the teachings of Zarathustra.

In its doctrinary aspect, the writing of the *Avesta* or *Zend-Avesta* is attributed to Zarathustra, but it seems that the prophet wrote only the *Yasna* (perhaps only seventeen of its hymns, or *Gathas*). The *Avesta* is made up of the *Yasna* (seventy-two chapters of Parsi liturgy); the *Vispared* (twenty-four chapters of invocations); the *Vendidad* (another twenty-two chapters); the *Yashts* (twenty-one

chapters with invocations to angels, which constitutes the *Avesta* of the priesthood); and the *Khordah Avesta* or *Minor Avesta* (book of priestly and private devotions).

For our quotation from the *Avesta,* we have used only the *Gathas* and the *Vendidad-Sade*. The *Gathas* were written in Avestin, the language of ancient Bactria, but the original texts suffered numerous vicissitudes from the time of Alexander's passage through Persia. That is why the material has come down to us in the Pehlevi language, surely with major gaps and interpolations of all kinds.

We should bear in mind that, probably owing to the wars or disputes that occurred between those primitive tribes, the division between the Indian and Iranian branches of the Aryans caused certain divinities or spirit-beings that were held in common at the time of their origin to diverge and even take on opposing characters. Thus, Indra and the Devas are worthy of devotion in the Hindu *Vedas,* but have a sinister character in the *Avesta.* The same occurs with the legendary Yima of the Avesta ("Jamshid, chief of peoples and herds" for Anquetil-Duperron, according to the citation of Bergua), who, in the *Vedas,* appears as Yama, the divinity of death (*Rig-Veda* 1, 38, 5). Haoma (Soma in the *Vedas*) and Mithra (the Vedic Mitra), however, both maintain their beneficent characteristics.

[2] This is an allusion to the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* "When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his home and the lakes of his home and went into the mountains." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* F. Nietzsche (London: Penguin, 1961, p. 39). It seems that Nietzsche's preoccupation with the Persian prophet began when, as a youth, he saw Zarathustra in his dreams. In correspondence with his sister Elizabeth and Lou Andreas Salomé, as well as in comments to Peter Gast and E. Rhode, Nietzsche describes Zarathustra as someone capable of founding a new morality—and, as such, a destroyer or transformer of established values.

[3] A reference to Zarathustra's cosmological and cosmogonic system, developed by Persian magi.

[4] Kine, soul of living beings and particularly of livestock. Ahura Mazda, divinity of Light, also known as Ohrmazd.

[5] Yasna 44.3. Adapted from *Avesta,* which see, e.g., transl. by J. Bergúa (Madrid: Bergúa, 1974).

[6] Yasna 44.4.

[7] Yasna 44.5.

[8] Yasna 44.6.

[9] Based on the second Fargard, 2ff. Adaptation of *Vendidad-Sade.*

[10] *Vendidad-Sade,* second Fargard, 2, 7ff.

[11] *Vendidad-Sade,* nineteenth Fargard, 52.

[12] *Vendidad-Sade,* tenth Fargard, 17.

[13] *Vendidad-Sade,* eighteenth Fargard, 29 and 31.

[14] *Vendidad-Sade,* fifteenth Fargard, 5 and 6.

[15] Yasna 30.3.

[16] Yasna 30.4.

[17] Yasna 30.5.

[18] Yasna 30.6.

[19] Yasna 30.8. Refers to the alliance between the Daeva spirits and Ahriman, god of darkness and evil.

[20] Yasna 30.8.

[21] Yasna 45.2.

[22] Yasna 53.2.

[23] Yasna 51.13.

[24] Yasna 49.11.

[25] Yasna 51.15.

VIII. Greco-Roman Myths

[1] Under this heading we have included not only a number of Greek and Roman myths but also myths belonging to the Cretan-Mycenean world, which would in reality, therefore, merit separate treatment. The reader will notice that we consistently use Greek rather than Roman names for the subjects dealt with, since the sons of Romulus absorbed their most prominent myths from Greek culture, at times changing only the names and places in which certain events unfolded. In no way are we saying that Roman culture never gave rise to its own myths and legends, for the successive waves of invaders of those lands must surely have encountered older inhabitants, who certainly possessed mythic and religious forms differing to a greater or lesser degree from the newer contributions. Moreover, the influence of the Greeks on Roman culture is not the only factor to consider, since numerous related "histories" come from the Egyptians, Phrygians, Hittites, and others.

Turning to the case at hand, we see that within Greek mythology itself the names of many gods have foreign origins. However, it is one thing to collect (and frequently transform) legends and myths from the pens of ancient mythographers, and it is quite another to understand the actual role that the gods, demigods, and other entities played in the personal and collective cult. In reality it is there—in the cults themselves—that the real importance of myths should be sought, and in relation to the system of beliefs that people held, more than to simple poetic, plastic, and at times philosophic expression, as for example in the case of Plato, creator of "myths" (*Symposium, Phaedo, Phaedrus, Republic,* and others) through which he expounds his doctrine. For our part, we have appealed to the texts of Homer, Pindar, Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus for their great expressive beauty. Of course, we have also drawn on Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days,* which, although they lack the poetic flight of other authors, constitute important works of compilation and "classification."

Historically, the myths that concern us circulated throughout the Greek-speaking world from the tenth century B.C.E. to approximately the fourth century of the present era. Thus, works such as those of Hecatus, written in the sixth century B.C.E., would have been of inestimable value, but unfortunately only dubious fragments of his four books of *Genealogies* have reached us. Nonetheless, that author's work seems to have decisively influenced Pherecyde, who writes on the first Athenian myths.

To be sure, it is not a question of rejecting later, including Roman, authors. However, in the measure that time passes, the tangle of information grows in such a way that the original source becomes confused with more recent creations. The most important beings mentioned in this chapter of "Greco-Roman myths" are (Greek designations with Roman equivalents): Cronus = Saturn; Zeus = Jupiter; Hera = Juno; Rhea = Cybele; Hermes = Mercury; Demeter = Ceres; Persephone = Proserpina; Dionysus = Bacchus; and Herakles = Hercules.

[2] Adaptation from Hesiod's *Theogony,* v. 154–81 (see, e.g., London: Penguin, 1973). Hesiod of Askra, first half of the seventh century B.C.E.(?).

[3] There are three Erinyes: Tisiphone (Avenger of Murder), Alecto (Unceasing in Anger), and Magaera (Ever Jealous). According to A. Garibay, all three refer to personifications of the idea of redressing the order destroyed by a crime. They have, among other missions, the mandate to repress the rebellion of the young against the old. They live in Erebus and are older than Zeus. For A. Bartra, they are the spirits of punishment and blood vengeance. Lastly, P. Grimal relates that they were born from the drops of blood with which the Earth was impregnated when Uranus was castrated. They were also called "Eumenides" and "the "Furies" by the Romans.

[4] *Theogony,* v. 460–74.

[5] *Theogony,* v. 470–501.

[6] *Theogony,* v. 686–92.

[7] *Theogony,* v. 693–99.

[8] *Theogony,* v. 717–20.

[9] *Theogony,* v. 730–32.
[10] Freely adapted from Euripides' *The Trojan Women;* see near the end of scene 11 in J. P. Sartre's adaptation (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1967). The quoted passage is the speech given by Poseidon, but we have taken the liberty of putting it in the mouth of Prometheus since it fits his character so closely, as well as the general context in which the Titan tells his tale. In any case, the surprise evoked by the introduction of admonishments such as: "Make war, stupid mortals—destroy fields and cities, violate temples and tombs, torture the vanquished—you only prepare your own destruction!" is understandable inasmuch as it breaks with the serious epic style in a mocking dissonance more proper to the mid-twentieth century, with a very Sartrean flavor. Euripides was born on Salamis in 480 B.C.E. and died in 406.
[11] Adapted from *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, Episode 2. Aeschylus was born in Eleusis in 525 B.C.E. and died in 456.
[12] *Prometheus Bound,* Episode 2, after the first Chorus.
[13] Son of Iapetus. Iapetus, in turn, is the son of Uranus and Gaia and brother of Cronus and the other Titans (Oceanus, Coeus, Hyperion, and Creus), and the Titanids (Tethys, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Dione, and Theia). The Titans and Titanids belong to the first generation of gods (called the "Titan gods"). From the line of Iapetus and Clymene come Atlantis, Menoetius, Prometheus, and Epimetheus; just as from the line of Cronus and Rhea come Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus. Prometheus is, then, a "cousin" of Zeus. But it is the line of Cronus (those of the "Cronida") that prevails. Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus (and his opposite, with his clumsiness and lack of ingenuity), accepts Pandora as a gift, and Zeus uses her to ruin humanity one more time. From Epimetheus and Pandora is born Pyrrha, and from Prometheus and Clymene is born Deucalion. These two form the couple that repopulates the world after the Flood that Zeus sent as a new punishment. And once again it is thanks to another action of Prometheus that human beings manage to save themselves. This comes about because Prometheus instructs Deucalion and Pyrrha to build an Ark. Afterward, the survivors of the catastrophe make men rise again by throwing stones behind themselves (over the shoulder), while they walk through the fields. Then women and men are born, a product of that "sowing." In all of the above, it is most notably the line of the children of Iapetus that promotes the propagation of the human being.
[14] *Theogony,* v. 535–70 and 615–18.
[15] *Theogony,* v. 521–25.
[16] Adapted from *The Homeric Hymns,* 2: To Demeter (in *Iliad* 2) (see, e.g., Buenos Aires: Losada, 1982).
[17] *On Nature,* 1 and 2, by Metrodorus of Kio.
[18] Adapted from *The Homeric Hymns,* 26: Hymn to Dionysus.

IX. Nordic Myths

[1] Regarding the antecedents of Nordic literature related to myths, F. Durand gives the following historical review: "In 1643, the Icelandic bishop of Skalholt discovered a manuscript, which he gave to Frederick III, king of Denmark. The *Codex Regius* contained, under the generic title of *Edda,* a group of very old poems that had been transcribed by Snorri in the early thirteenth century. Later the manuscript of another scholar, Saemund, was found, which contained the same works and shed light on the use of the plural, *Eddas*. Conceived in a pre-literary era, the greater part these poems appear to date from the seventh and eighth centuries, but certain philologists date the most archaic of them as belonging to the sixth century. It is evident that these poems were first recited in Norway, and were transmitted from generation to generation until the colonizers brought them to the island of 'fire and ice.' Later, the medieval scribes copied them onto vellum parchment, saving them from oblivion. The rest of Scandinavia also participated in carrying forward this work. So, for example, in

the Danish *History of Saxo Grammaticus* there can be found Latin translations of what can be characterized as proto-Eddic works.

"The magnificent tenth century Danish poem, the *Bjarkemaalet,* which Olaf made his men sing in formation in Stiklestad, differs only slightly from certain Eddic strophes." See, e.g., *Los Vikingos,* F. Durand (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1975, pp. 108–109). In this way, a tradition that had begun in the era of migrations (between the third and fourth centuries) and spread throughout the Germanic world, was recovered.

This particular mythic literature remained restricted to the Scandinavian environment, but if we are speaking of groups of more or less epic Nordic legends or writings, we find as many productions in England as in Germany and other countries. However, owing to a complex of factors, including geography, we are here focusing on a type of literature that is found concentrated principally in Iceland. From the discovery and colonization of Iceland by the Norwegians (around C.E. 874) to the first generation of Christian Icelanders (around C.E. 1000), numerous phenomena occurred throughout the Scandinavian world that can readily be shown to coincide with the "Viking cycle."

This turbulent epoch, of expansion and continuous conflict, ran head-on into the advance of the continental powers and Christianity. During this period, invaluable documentation was destroyed or lost in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. However, in Iceland, an enormous body of work was preserved, and moreover continued to be produced, until well into the eighth century. This is the case of the *Elder Edda,* from which we have drawn the verses with mythological themes, leaving aside the epic themes. Fortunately for literature, the towering figure of Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) then appeared. He composed numerous sagas, and, particularly in his *Gylfaginning* (*The Deluding of Gylfi*), and to some degree in his *Skaldskaparmal* (*The Poetics*), single-handedly rescued Nordic mythology. Thus, thanks to the Icelanders we have the *Elder Edda* or *Verse Edda* (also known as the *Poetic Edda*), as well as the *Younger Edda* (or *Prose Edda* or *Snorri's Edda*), which together constitute the most reliable sources of Nordic mythology.

[2] *Elder Edda,* Völuspá, 17–18.

[3] This is a generic designation for the gods. When speaking of a particular goddess, she would be called an Asinia.

[4] Space filled with energy. When the ice stopped flowing, this place was filled and sank from the weight of the ice. When, in some places, ice and volcanic fire fought with one another and the frozen glaciers melted, Ymir began to form from the drops of water. Ymir is the first of the Frost Giants. He has within him volcanic heat and some of the energy of Ginnungagap.

[5] The place of northern ice, as opposed to Muspel, the mythic hot region of the south. There lives a giant who brandishes a sword of fire with which he defends the place. At the end of time he will leave there and set the world afire.

[6] A spring.

[7]The serpent that gnaws at the roots of Yggdrasil.

[8] One of the Aesir.

[9] Adapted from *The Gylfaginning* (*The Deluding of Gylfi*). The loss of an eye in exchange for a greater good also appears reflected in other legends and stories such as the following, which moreover tells us something about bellicose Viking behavior: "When he reached the farm where Armod and his wife and daughter were sleeping, Egil threw open the door and went to Armod's bed. Drawing his sword, he grabbed Armod's beard with his other hand and pulled him to the edge of the bed. But Armod's wife and daughter quickly rose and pleaded with Egil not to kill him. Egil said that although Armod deserves to be killed, he would desist for their sakes. And so Egil cut the beard from Armod's chin; then he *plucked out Armod's eye* with his finger and left it hanging on his cheek; then Egil and his companions departed." *Egil's Saga,* Snorri Sturluson.

[10] Based on *The Song of the Nibelungen.*

[11] The spirit of the past. The Norns should be viewed as engraving on their tablets, that is, imprinting the magic runes in which they set down people's destinies. This is not a case, then, of their being "spinners" in the style of the Roman Parcae or the Greek Moirae.
[12] The spirit of the present.
[13] The spirit of the future.
[14] Adapted from *The Gylfaginning,* 6 and 16.
[15] The dwelling of the heroes. The Valkyries choose the valiant who die in battle, but also decide the outcome of the battles. These warrior women bring to mind the Amazons, although their action is somewhat less direct. We are also reminded of historical precedents in which the women of the primitive Germans participated in, and at times affected, the outcome of battles. It is possible that such customs later contributed to the mythification of the Viking Valkyries.

In his *Germanica,* Tacitus (C.E. 55–120) tells us: "Close at hand, too, are their dearest, whence is heard the wailing voice of woman and the child's cry: here are the witnesses who are in each man's eyes most precious; here the praise he covets most: they take their wounds to mother and wife, who do not shirk from counting the hurts and demanding a sight of them: they minister to the combatants food and exhortation.

"Tradition relates that some having lost, or losing battles, have been restored thanks to their women, by their incessant prayers and by the baring of their breasts; for so is it brought home to the men that the slavery, which they dread much more keenly on their women's account, is close at hand: it follows that the loyalty of those tribes is more effectually guaranteed from whom, among other hostages, maids of high birth have been exacted.

"Further, they conceive that in woman there is a certain uncanny and prophetic sense: they neither scorn to consult them nor slight their answers." Tacitus, *Germania,* transl. W. Peterson (London: William Heinemann, 1914).
[16] Tacitus (*Germanica,* p. 346) referring to the inebriating drink (beer) and to the nutritional habits of the primitive Germans, comments: "They make a drink of barley and wheat that is something like wine. Those who live near the shores of the Rhine buy it. Their food is simple: wild apples, fresh venison, and curdled milk. Without any pomp, fuss, or luxury they satisfy their hunger; but they do not use the same temperance against thirst. And if one gave them to drink as much as they like, it would be as easy to defeat them with wine as with weapons."

Mead is mentioned in the *Edda*—a drink of the gods and one that should not be confused with beer, even though they are sometimes figuratively identified.
[17] Since Wagner, "Ragnarök" has been translated as the "Twilight of the Gods." However, a more correct translation would be "Destiny of the Gods," which we have taken as the title of this scene.
[18] Adapted from *La Alucinación de Gylfi,* Snorri Sturluson, transl. J. L. Borges (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1984, 51).
[19] *Völuspa,* 58.
[20] *Völuspa,* 45.
[21] *La Alucinación de Gylfi,* 51.
[22] This final speech of Haki's is loosely reminiscent of Snorri's description in the *Ynglingasaga* of the battle of Fyrisvellir, in which Haki was seriously wounded. "And so he ordered his ship to be brought, he had it loaded with dead men and their weapons, he had it launched, he had the helm set toward the sea and the sails hoisted, and had a pyre of dry wood lit on deck. The wind blew from the land. Haki was dying or already dead when he was laid on the pyre. The flaming ship then disappeared over the horizon, and this was long etched in memory." The bitterness of a world that is dying is reflected in the words that we have put in Haki's mouth. Haki is not a Viking who converts to Christianity—on the contrary, he makes us understand that the defeat before the advancing religion

(that of the “foreign peoples”) is in reality only an interval during which numerous Nordic images and myths invade the conqueror.

X. American Myths

[1] There are numerous American myths, including brilliant productions such as *The Book of Chilam Balam,* a great literary monument of the Mayan culture in the Yucatán region of Mexico. In our treatment, we have focused on the book of the Quichés of Guatemala, which has been translated under various titles: *Popul Vuh: The Ancient Stories of the Quiché* by A. Recinos (Mexico: F.C.E. Our references are to the sixth printing of 1970, although the book was written in 1947); *Popul Vuh or Book of the Council of the Quiché Indians* by M. Asturias and J. M. Gonzalez de Mendoza (Buenos Aires: Losada. Our references are to the second edition of 1969, although it was written in 1927); *Pop Wuj: Mytho-historical Kiche Poem* by Adrian I. Chavez (Quetzaltenango, Guatemala: Centro Editorial Vile. We reference the first edition of 1981, although the text was written in 1979).

The Recinos translation was based on the manuscript entitled *Art of the Three Tongues* (*Arte de las Tres Lenguas*), written at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Friar Francisco Ximenez. The original document passed to the Brasseur collection and later into the hands of A. Pinart, who in turn sold it to E. Aller, and from there it reached the Newberry Library, from which Recinos obtained a photocopy.

Arciniegas’s work was translated to the Spanish from the French version, entitled *Les dieux, les héros, et les hommes de l’ancien Guatemala d’aprés le Livre du Conseil* by P. Reynaud, who used the Ximenez manuscript. And finally, the Chavez translation was also based on the Ximenez manuscript, although with the precaution of preserving the two columns that the friar had used. Ximenez had put the Quiché transcription (Hispanicized) in the first column and the Spanish translation in the second column. Chavez updated the original Quiché transcribed by Ximenez and used that material as the basis of his Spanish translation. In 1927 a translation by Villacorta and Rodas, based on the French text of Brasseur, was published in Guatemala, but the book has remained unavailable to us. The same occurred with another Brasseur translation by J. Arriola, published in Guatemala in 1972. In each case, the source document is that of Ximenez. Between 1701 and 1703, a manuscript written in the Quiché language but using the Latin alphabet came to him through the royal council of the town of Santo Tomás (today Chichicastenango). The document dated from the mid-sixteenth century. Unfortunately, the original was lost, but Ximenez took care to copy it, although with some alterations.

[2] Chavez believes that this phrase refers to the crossing from Asia of the new inhabitants of North America—that is, from the West.

[3] Chavez states that the “paintings” were real books or tablets folded together and bound, and not simply isolated engravings on rock, bone, or wood. Supporting his point of view, he cites *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* by Friar Diego de Landa, in which the author says: “We found a great number of their books, their letters, and because there was nothing there that did not involve superstition and the falsity of the demon, we burned all of it. This they felt very strongly and suffered greatly from it.”

[4] Adapted from the translation by Recinos, *Popul Vuh: The Ancient Stories of the Quiché.*

[5] From here to the end our text also draws on the translation of Arciniegas.

[6] Chavez believes that this is some sort of oil from a cosmic cataclysm. But it could be the result of burning petroleum expelled in the rupture of a methane stratum during a volcanic eruption.

[7] A reference to a long and winding “descent” from very cold regions to regions more suitable for permanent settlements.

Day of the Winged Lion

Short Stories

House of Transit

Barek-el-Muftala had disappeared. I had been wandering since early morning among the stalls of the import shops that filled the marketplace and no one could tell me anything certain concerning his whereabouts. Finally, amid the confusion of rumors, an aging fruit vendor informed me that three days earlier he had seen Barek leave the city's yellow zone. The note he pressed into my hand gave an address in Malinkadassi. Setting off toward the main plaza, I made my way past yogurt vendors, sellers of bronze, and the other merchants. Stopping for a brief rest, I ordered *shá*, refusing both coffee and the hookah. Eventually I made my way to the bus station and hired a cab. After a long ride, the driver let me out in front of a large bungalow with a bronze plaque that read simply, "House of Transit."

At the door, I received the information I had been seeking. "He's inside," they told me. Making my way through the crowd, I emerged in an enormous room. A great circle of mourners surrounded an open coffin that, with its open lid supported by a wooden brace, looked almost like a grand piano.

A fat man standing next to the casket recited prayers in a loud voice; at intervals the others responded. From time to time the man extended his right hand into the coffin, as if to straighten the clothing or perhaps the shroud of the deceased. Inching forward, I soon found myself near the center of all this activity. It was only then that I realized that the officiant was attempting to calm the person I had supposed was deceased—but who I could see was even now struggling to lift his head. Groaning weakly, Barek-el-Muftala lay right in front of my nose, his head swathed in bandages. It appeared that he had suffered a grievous accident and was in the process of dying.

A boy arrived with a container, which he gave to the fat man—and events began to unfold in rapid succession. Without a trace of emotion the clergyman removed the lid and, opening Barek's mouth, poured in the contents. Then, with a movement that was not at all rough but rather soft and gentle, he closed the dying man's jaw with one hand and held his nostrils shut with the other. Gazing at the relatives, he rocked Barek's head from side to side, all the while holding him by the nose. After a time he climbed onto a chair they had brought him and, balancing precariously, he leaned far over the coffin. There he remained, examining Barek with great care, until at length he stepped down.

At this point, the clergyman, with the satisfaction of a job well done, withdrew from the room with the gravity and demeanor appropriate to the circumstances. This, in turn, signaled the bursting of the dam that had held back the outpouring of emotions that occurs upon the death of a dear friend. I stood by solemnly as the weeping spread through the assembly, and I could not help but notice how Barek's daughter's green eyes grew moist with tears. As his sole descendant, she had authorized her father's euthanasia, and of the many ways to die, she had certainly known how to choose the most refined.

The Great Silence

At noon the grape pickers rested in the shade where the vines grew thickest. Having finished their lunch they tried, futilely, to take their siesta. The 100-plus degree heat silenced the birds and the horses, drowsing in their corrals. Even the trucks and tractors that pulled the wagons sat waiting in the protection of their sheds. Only the slightest breeze rustled the vine leaves, and you could barely hear the faint murmur of the water flowing in the irrigation ditches. It was a dry, brutally hot afternoon of the kind known only to those who live under the intense blue skies of arid lands such as these. Almost suffocated by the heat, you might swear that you could hear the crackle of the sun striking the scorched surface of the earth.

I watched as, despite the heat, an unlikely figure crossed the rows of grapevines until he came to a wide lane. I saw how his faithful dog followed a few steps behind; how the man dropped his pants, exposing his flat buttocks to the sunlight; and how, squatting down, he released a thick, dark flow that mixed with the dust. I saw it instantly solidify, and watched as the dog—opening its mouth with the precision of a machine shovel—picked up a perfect, solid piece.

I felt faint; perhaps it was the heat. For whatever reason, the blood must not have reached my brain, because for a moment the sun seemed to be a transparent bubble. Suddenly, the man's buttocks gleamed and the bodies of both master and dog froze in their absurd positions. There was no breeze, not the faintest murmur of water in the ditches, not a single heartbeat, no heat, no sensation whatever. The Great Silence had suddenly erupted in the pretext of that strange disjuncture.

Afterwards, the lazy flow of existence once more gave life to the ants and the furtive lizard. A far-off neighing reminded me that I had returned to the world of everyday life.

Carrying my harvesting pail, I picked up my pruning shears, and with a happiness that spread outward in ever-widening circles, I began cutting one bunch of grapes after another.

Enter Your Answer!

How the computer could write poems all by itself was something that had intrigued me for quite some time. The worst of it was that it invariably happened just as I left the room. But today I've finally lined up all the clues. This is it, my friend—you've had it now, you stupid TZ-28300!

Everything had been fine until just a moment ago. Surrounded by equipment and chemicals, I had been working at my keyboard in the lab. I was sipping my coffee while Wolf, as usual, slept on his rug in the corner. To assist in my research I was using the "expert system" chemistry program I had installed on the TZ-28300. Reaching the point in the sequence where the computer asked, "Does it melt easily?" I entered "No," and it proceeded to offer suggestions and conclusions, printing them out on paper so that I could review them later.

"It is probably an ionic compound. Will it dissolve?"

"Yes," I typed.

"Measure the pH and indicate whether it is an acid, alkaline, or neutral compound. *Enter your answer!"*

"Neutral."

"It is a neutral salt. Use a flame test to determine the metal it contains. *Enter your answer."*

In a few minutes I typed in the name of the metal.

"Determine the radicals: If a white precipitate appears when barium chloride is added, it is a sulfate radical. If it turns white when silver nitrate is added, it is a chloride. If it releases carbon dioxide when heated, it is a carbonate. Combine the metal and the radical to determine the name of the compound. *Enter your answer!"*

I walked into the other room looking for glassware to continue the experiment when, as so many times before, I heard the high-pitched whine announcing that data was being printed out. I rushed back to find the printer devouring blank paper at one end and spewing out printed text at the other.

Before my eyes, the computer was creating a sequence of characters that could not have been generated by the chemistry program I was using. TZ-28300 was combining chemical data with a variety of personal information I kept in the computer. To this it was adding fragments from an encyclopedia stored on the hard disk.

The explanation for this strange mixture was not as otherworldly as it might appear. No doubt it had been triggered by two or three areas of memory mingling because of something like an inopportune merge instruction. The only problem with this explanation is that I would still have had to enter some command—but I'd been out of the room. On top of that, it would have been necessary for the merged data to pass through a word processor with artificial intelligence capabilities, just as it did each time my chemistry program printed out its questions and instructions. Obviously this involved too many chance events all converging in precisely the same direction!

I allowed paper to continue spewing out until I was able to make out a few intelligible stanzas:

All flowers are phanerogamous.
You, on the other hand, Marie Brigitte
(telephone 942-1318, 2317 Maple Street)
are at once exquisite and absurd—
restless, unrevealing, and cryptogrammic!

In the heat of the flame, I will gaze at
your copper green,
your lithium rose/red,
your strontium carmine.
Irascible and irreducible monogamist!

Not all metal is irreducible,
nor oxygen debt combustible.
TO DO:
Pick up iron filings at the lab supply
And dog food at the grocery

I rushed over to the printer and turned it off. So I was to pick up “dog food at the grocery,” was I? Through its free association the machine had now begun to order me about. Again I think to myself, “This is it, my friend—you’ve had it now you stupid TZ-28300!” It’s time to take action, but I must do things carefully, step by step, avoiding any mistakes.

I begin by turning off the system. After a few moments, I turn it back on again. I hear a “click,” and the hard disk begins to whir, as it winks at me with luminous diodes. I open the expert system chemistry program. Everything is working perfectly. I stand up and walk noisily into the adjacent room, leaving the door slightly ajar. I move around for a few moments, and then sneak back to the door of the lab, peering carefully through the crack, from which I can observe a good part of the room.

Just as I suspected! I see a form gliding stealthily toward the computer. With a bound, it’s at the keyboard. As I make my noisy entrance, Wolf slinks whimpering back to his corner, where he lies down and plays dead.

I lean over and scold the culprit. “The Phantom of the Opera—is that who you think you are? Putting your wet nose all over my keyboard! We’ll see about that!”

Wolf perks up. Like an oversized puppy he raises himself on his large German Shepherd paws. Sitting on his haunches, with ears pricked up and muzzle pointed straight ahead, he observes me unperturbed. As I continue to scold him, he begins to stare at me with an almost *human* look; disarmed, I rub his nose.

Behind me I hear a “click.” The hard disk begins to spin. What’s happening? The luminous diodes blink, and the whine of the printer fills the room. I stand up, and in two steps I’m at the computer. But the printer has stopped gobbling up paper. The diodes remain lit, but quiet. I look at Wolf, sitting in his corner, fixing me with his *human* look. I have the strange sensation that there is some kind of waiting game going on among the three of us—TZ-28300, Wolf, and me. I make the first move. Tearing off the printed sheet, I hold it up and read:

Perhaps you would like to feed your dog? Perhaps you would prefer to dissolve him in an acid, an alkaline, or a neutral substance?

ENTER YOUR ANSWER!

The Funeral Pyre

Leaning on the railing of the bridge, I scrutinized the group of people that had gathered along the river's edge. I saw them fail to find branches or logs dry enough to fuel the roaring fire, which they had somehow been able to start. They managed, after several tries, to feed the fire with rags and old copies of the *Nepal Telegraph.* The rising flames seemed to trigger a decision, and some sort of pallet was placed on the funeral pyre. Suddenly the fire blazed higher—perhaps because it had begun to consume the burlap sling fastened between the two pieces of wood, or perhaps it was fueled by the shroud in which the deceased was wrapped. Whatever the reason, the flames did not last long. As the men added wet branches and leaves, smoke engulfed the scene, and the group scattered, coughing. The wind shifted, and two men again approached the fire and began pushing the body toward the water, betraying a hint of anger and impatience as they performed this task. It was the opposite of the usual cremation that normally ends with the gathering of the ashes, which will later be scattered on the river.

The body bobbed gently along until, in the grip of some new force, it entered the main current of the river. The group looked on in silence as the corpse drifted away from them; while from my perspective, standing where I was on the bridge, it drew closer. The body was naked. Only its right side had been slightly burned, the right half of the face singed. Perched on the cadaver, a crow pecked at its left eye, the one untouched by the flames. As the corpse passed beneath the bridge, I again turned my attention to the group, still poised at the river's edge. They hadn't moved. As I leaned on the railing, waiting for them to leave, I remembered the various kinds of funerals that take place around the world—some modest and some magnificent, some immaculately clean and others less than sanitary. I thought of the burials, the cremations, the dismemberments, and the grinding of bones; of corpses left exposed to the birds and wild beasts; of those protected by rocks, placed in trees, in hollows or in caves; and of those laid to rest in magnificent mausoleums, in temples, and in gardens. I imagined ash-filled urns being launched into outer space, cryogenic suspension…

Yawning, I stretched, suddenly realizing how hungry I was.

Salt in the Eyes, Ice on the Feet

I knew Fernando from work, he was a good friend and an outstanding scientist. Inexplicably, he had abandoned his duties and left for Africa. Later I heard that he was in Alaska. Two years passed and no one knew with any certainty what had happened to him. If he is still alive he must be completely crazy by now, and I can imagine how he might have begun to come unhinged. Among the papers he left behind in our lab was a strange, scrawled note of a nature far removed from his normal research reports. Here it is.

August 26, 1980

It happened early yesterday morning, a few hours after I had finished drinking a weak infusion made from some emerald-green leaves. I was alone in the biology lab. Music wafted through the air from a small speaker in the front wall. I believe that at that moment it was a slow rhythm of vocals and percussion. Meanwhile, seated at my lab bench, I was growing annoyed not only at how cold my feet were, but especially at the sharp cramp running down my right leg. I had worked all night, and in spite of how sore my eyes were, I increased the brightness of the microscope's condenser. For the tenth time I peered through the instrument at the plant specimen, and saw the brilliant emerald green of the stomata. I increased the magnification to 500, but the focus was different in each eyepiece, perhaps because of some misalignment of the instrument. Then I realized it wasn't due to a mechanical problem or simple eye fatigue. Without blinking, I peered through the eyepieces and noticed that the images were unconnected—my left eye saw one thing, my right eye quite another—while each image seemed to transform continuously, following the flow of the music.

The stomata had disappeared, and in the right eyepiece I saw groups of people jostling around in a cold and icy environment, at the same time the images in the left eyepiece were related to salt and heat. I understood that the salt translated my fatigue filtered through the corresponding image in my left eye, while my right eye saw images that translated the cold and the cramp in my right foot. Notwithstanding the dissociation, the images connected perfectly with an internal "voice" that seemed to ramble on about the microscope. The movements of the images that I saw varied with the music; sometimes the sound would turn into a gust of wind blowing into my face.

Stepping away from the microscope, I organized a simple chart on which I could arrange all the dissociated elements—always connecting them to the central theme, which I formalized as follows: **Through the eyepieces light colors predominated. Everything gleamed in the light focused by the microscope's condenser, but above were the lenses that intensified the light source, shining painfully, crystal-clear, into my eyes, long past the point of fatigue.**

I rambled on about the microscope in this way: **Through the eyepieces**…

In the left eye… I began to see people in colorful groups, gathered around tall stalagmites of salt—Africans of different nationalities, trading with each other. Slowly they untied their bundles in which… (**light colors predominated**).

In the right eye… *I found myself in a lonely desert of parched, cracked clay. Everything was dark, almost black. With a smooth motion, the broken surface began melting into a single slab, when suddenly…* (**light colors predominated**).

And this is how the entire sequence went:

Through the eyepieces,

I began to see people in colorful groups, gathered around tall stalagmites of salt—Africans of various nationalities, trading with each other. Slowly they untied their bundles in which…

I found myself in a lonely desert of parched, cracked clay. Everything was dark, almost black. With a smooth motion, the broken surface began melting into a single slab, when suddenly…

light colors predominated.

The human situation was extraordinary. Standing before the pointed mounds, no one seemed to be in a hurry. Various groups sang a hymn, swaying in perfect time to the rhythm. Stalagmites of salt rose like termite mounds.

The ground froze and I saw myself walking on an endless sheet of ice.

Beginning in my feet, a tingling sensation spread through my body,

Everything gleamed in the light focused by the microscope's condenser,

and I asked myself how those formations could have been created, since this would have required heavy downpours,

while my face was whipped by gusts of wind. Below, the ice cracked, opening vast, bottomless crevasses,

but above were the lenses

in this clear sky that could have provided no rain. In any case, some liquid must have left behind the salt that formed these stalagmites.

So it was that these mounds arose, reaching toward the clear skies—anxious but free, strong and without anger.

so that I found myself beset from all sides. Overwhelmed and nearly defeated, I listened to the furious roar.

In that awful wind, the reflection played capriciously, shining off the separate blocks.

that intensified the light source,
shining painfully, crystal-clear, into my eyes,
long past the point of fatigue.

Tales

Kaunda

The Zambian ambassador continued to press the point all week long—his instructions were clear: he was not to leave Florence without bringing me to Lusaka.

I arrived on January 10, 1989, accompanied by Antonio and Fulvio. A reception committee greeted us at the foot of the stairs leading from the plane, where we were immediately surrounded by armed guards and escorted to three long, black limousines. Our motorcade sped along a road that skirted the periphery of the city, before it cut through the downtown. As the motorcycle escort opened a path through the crowd, I glimpsed long lines of women holding their undernourished children, as they waited for the ration centers to open.

Ten minutes later, surrounded by armored vehicles and having passed through a maze of barricades, we arrived at the presidential palace. On getting out of the limousines we were led to an ebony-paneled room where President Kaunda and his entire cabinet awaited us. The President gave a welcoming speech, emphasizing our ideological importance to the Revolution. I responded briefly, and Antonio translated for the television cameras. With haughty bearing and studied gestures, President Kaunda spoke, addressing not only us, but his wider audience as well. As his focus shifted between the two, his style ranged from sober to paternalistic. A long white handkerchief—a kind of personal trademark—could always be found clutched in his left hand. That famous handkerchief! When he spoke, he might shake it violently or slice the air with it, and everyone would understand the significance of his gesture. While listening, he might knead it at length, and those present would get the message. And if he accompanied a caress of the cloth with an occasional “I see,” it was a definite sign of approval.

It took us just two days to make all our preparations. Only our ongoing discussions with the head of the country’s sole political party ended on a sour note. In general, all the information we needed was made available to us, and the problems the country was experiencing were discussed frankly. We checked this new information against the sometimes astounding facts Fulvio was collecting and added it to the mass of data he had brought from Europe.

Kaunda showed us his pet impalas grazing peacefully in the presidential gardens. In that bucolic Eden, neither the African countryside nor the afternoon breeze kept me from imagining the situation as if it were being viewed from above: every approach under the watchful eye of men with walkie-talkies; a little farther out, the barricades and armored vehicles; and in the distance, reserve troops. Beyond this lay Lusaka, overcrowded and hungry—with parched fields and mines for copper and other strategic metals depleted at unconscionably low prices by a handful of multinational companies pulling strings that extended far beyond the shores of Africa to distant points of the globe.

These images were not just a cross-section in space, I could also see this place ten, twenty, thirty years earlier—even centuries before when there were no countries, but only tribes and kingdoms, and the strings of control extended only a short distance. I understood that sooner or later the regime would be toppled because its will to change was bound by those multicolored

strings. Nonetheless, I felt something like gratitude for the support it offered the anti-apartheid movement and the struggle to liberate South Africa. For this reason, knowing all the while that our project would never come to pass, Antonio laid out a detailed plan for what needed to be done…

After dinner on the third night, we went down into a bunker through a hallway filled with paintings on both sides. The figures depicted included Mandela, Lumumba, and many other heroes of the African cause. Tito and leaders from other continents could also be seen. Suddenly I found myself before a particular painting, and I asked Kaunda about it.

"What's Belaúnde doing here?"

"That's Allende," the President responded.

"No, it's Terry Belaúnde, the Christian Socialist ex-president of Peru, a man who was not very progressive, but well-connected to the business interests of the Club Naciónal of Lima."

Kaunda took the painting and, without batting an eye, smashed it on the floor. He said something about Salvador Allende, but I was looking at the empty space on the wall and the fragments of glass on the floor. For an instant, I had the impression that paintings were being hung and removed along infinite hallways at Chaplinesque speed, like scenes in a silent film; oppressors and the oppressed, heroes and villains replaced one another, until all that was left on a colorless wall was a single empty intention—the image of humanity's future.

We arrived at the bunker.

While Fulvio focused his camera and took pictures of every last detail, Antonio—elegant, almost metallic—opened his folder and coolly presented a detailed critique of the situation. As he spoke, I noticed the handkerchief at first being squeezed, then knotted, and finally, just as the presentation ended, abandoned on a side table. Antonio spoke openly and without reservation, in a way that would have shocked any politician. Nonetheless, I could see that everything he said went straight to the heart. It seemed to me that Antonio embodied a truth that both preceded him and projected into the future. Behind those cold words lay the foundation of all the causes for which humankind has struggled, and I believe everyone present understood what he said in this same way. Kaunda, obviously moved, had no recourse but to concur with his customary "I see," but the words were uttered with such sadness and in such a way that it seemed he must have been peering into the mirror of his soul.

"To conclude our analysis, which we believe faithfully reflects everything that we have seen, we would like to emphasize once again our fifth point relating to the immediate dissolution of the country's sole political party and the holding of free, multiparty elections within a year's time. This must be accompanied by the release of all political prisoners and the right of return and participation for all exiles involved in the political struggle. The existing controls over the media must be replaced with free expression in all its forms, even at the risk of allowing the shameless enemies of the Zambian people to use their considerable resources to seek some temporary advantage from this situation. We would also like to focus attention on point number eight, which touches on the feasibility of a permanent council of the seven African nations in order to set, at the international level, the minimum price of strategic metals. Also, as regards the campaign against South Africa, the seven countries should close their airspace in order to limit the freedom of movement on the part of the racist regime.

"Apart from this, if we are going to speak of a profoundly human revolution, we must begin by dismantling the apparatus of repression, which—although it was set up as a defense against foreign provocateurs and their fifth column—has led us to spy upon, control, jail, and even execute our own citizens. A revolution that loses touch with the meaning of human life is a

revolution without meaning!" Antonio closed his folder, and without any show of emotion delivered it to Kaunda's secretary, along with another folder filled with reports.

The President looked at me from his enormous throne-like sofa. I gazed deep within him and said:

"Excellency, even if none of what we have said can be put into effect because the circumstances simply do not allow it, we have nonetheless spoken truly and only after conscientiously studying the situation. I trust that you and the members of your cabinet are able to forgive us for what we have said."

Like a giant, Kaunda stood up, and to my surprise rushed to embrace me. The ministers did the same with Fulvio and Antonio; suddenly I was overwhelmed by the feeling that I had lived all this before.

We departed from Lusaka with a feeling of failure. However, we soon learned that Kaunda had begun important reforms. Gradually he freed political prisoners; he established freedom of the press; he abolished the monopoly that had been held by the nation's sole political party; he publicly acknowledged his errors; he called general elections, and, upon being defeated, handed over power, becoming an ordinary citizen.

A newspaper in San Francisco reported the following: "After leading his country to independence from England in 1964, Kenneth Kaunda was the president of Zambia for twenty-seven years. In his favor we can say that he remained steadfast in his struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and that many advances in that country would have happened more slowly without his decisive help. In his own land he faced enormous economic difficulties, especially following the decline of world copper prices. Beginning in the early 1980s, poverty increased sharply in Zambia. Average annual per capita income dropped to just $300, barely half what it had been two decades earlier. There were shortages and high prices for cornmeal, the principal staple. Worst of all, a significant fraction of the population was afflicted with AIDS, as the country achieved the unfortunate distinction of having among the highest infection rates in the world. Foreign aid had also been cut off in September when the World Monetary Fund demanded a $20 million debt payment. In early November, this culminated in Kaunda's defeat by labor leader Frederick Chiluba in the first multiparty elections held since independence. In contrast to Sese Seko Mobutu, who, after twenty-six years in power, continued to repress the opposition in Zaire, Kaunda peacefully left power."

I have not seen Kaunda since, but I know that on some crystal-clear nights under his African sky, he continues asking the questions that I did not know how to answer:

"What will our Destiny be, after all the hardships and all the mistakes? Why, when we struggle against injustice, do we become unjust? Why is there poverty and inequality if we are all born and die between one roar of the lion and the next. Are we a branch that has broken, are we the cry of the wind, are we the river that runs to the sea? Or are we, perhaps, a dream of the branch, the wind, and the river that runs to the sea?"

Pamphlet to the Rhythm of a Tango

> Pamphlet. (From the English. Contraction of *Pamphilet,* the name of a twelfth-century satirical comedy in Latin verse entitled *Pamphilus, seu de Amore*). A biting satirical opuscule that levels wide-ranging criticism without serious foundation.
>
> Tango. (Probably onomatopoeic). Argentine dance comprising an intertwined couple, a binary musical form, and a two-four beat. Internationally known, it was used by Hindemith and Milhaud. Stravinsky introduced it into one movement of his “Histoire du Soldat” in 1918.

Andrés spent most of his time contemplating his navel. In free moments he would peek at the outside world through a keyhole. I met him in 1990 in that place in South America they call Argentina. He was—how should I put it? —an “Argentine,” a man of silver. However, since he had no money, this collective appellation only frustrated him. I remember our first meeting well, it was in a restaurant just before a class I was about to give in computational gastronomy, one of my areas of expertise. My topic on that occasion was “How to Prepare a Superb Low-Cholesterol Salad, One Leaf of Lettuce at a Time.”

It was true that Andrés appreciated fine cuisine, but because he believed that only in his country was meat eaten as it should be, he was unable to accept my teachings on the full range of ways in which beef can be prepared. This shortsightedness kept him from becoming a first-rate *sous chef*. Thus anguished at the prospect of having to choose between the only two options left to him, he wound up ruining his stomach and embittering his life.

According to Andrés, his “homeland” (as he liked to call it) was suffering an extraordinary tragedy. To me it seemed more a case of childhood measles, at a time, in terms of the life of the nation, when junk food should be avoided and dietary matters monitored most carefully. Thanks to such precautions, the peoples of the Middle East had managed to avoid trichinosis from pork. And Scandinavians imposed their blond beer on those who drank red wine, later pushing weak tea on the messed-up consumers of black coffee from Brazil and Colombia.

Be mindful of what you eat and drink! How can one compare the spirituality of Ceylonese tea (as demonstrated by such notable Theosophists as Bessant and Olcott) to coffee, a substance whose trade has never been controlled by either Victorians or naturopaths? How is it possible to equate margarine with butter and oil, those sources of cholesterol? How can one compare a simple lemon pie to the endless varieties of ham, cheese, and sausage found in Latin countries? It would be like equating the simple elegance of a little Grandma Moses with the excesses of a Goya, a Gauguin, or a Picasso. Which is why the Germans have so many problems—they are simply unable to decide once and for all between wine and beer, Hegel and Alvin Toffler, Goethe and Agatha Christie, between Bach and Cole Porter. History shows that if Roman emperors had only been more careful, they would not have suffered the decline brought on by drinking red wine from unhygienic goblets. Still, I must disagree with those who blame

those vessels for both lead poisoning and a host of other diseases that left the emperors unfit to command. Indeed, computational gastronomy has demonstrated that it was filling their bellies with a mixture of wine and honey that brought about their demise—and well-deserved it was, I might add! Had it not occurred the world would still be mired in the dark ages. We wouldn't be measuring things in gallons, inches, feet, yards, miles, and Fahrenheit. The beautiful lines of the Rolls Royce and the bowler hat would not have been invented. No one would drive on the left or wear John Lennon granny glasses. Few would use the evocative word, "shadow." Nor would the Mexican sombrero and saddle have been passed on to the Texans. American tap dancing would be confined to the feet of Andalusians. And nightclub and television performers wouldn't point at the audience with their index fingers. In such a primitive state of affairs, who would there be to perform *Singing in the Rain*? And who would chew gum, preparing the buccal enzymes and improving the flow of ptyalin for proper digestion?

Need it be said that keeping abreast of dietary matters is a matter of utmost importance? But my apprentice was unable to appreciate this, despite all my pedagogical efforts. He remained engrossed in his own little problems, peering at the world through the length of a tube of pasta. He explained to me that in earlier decades his country had been a truly extraordinary place. (I use the word "extraordinary" because Andrés, when he said it, would lift his moist, bovine eyes to the heavens and, blinking slowly, fall into a tangoesque reverie.) To be sure, there was a simple explanation for this little crisis. But he dared not admit it—because in place of the warmth and protection of his small South American community, he yearned to be part of a superpower that would make its presence felt. He couldn't accept the fact that during this period, marked by the fall of bureaucracies and the rise of globalization, national boundaries were being erased and the eighteenth-century model of the nation-state demolished. Though he didn't realize it, he was a left-wing nationalist, an *avis rara* (in the hyperbole of Juvenal) of the type found in those places where emotional and dietary factors intermingle. Of course, feelings and taste-buds go hand in hand the world around, but international cuisine adds a dash of illusion to calm the anxieties of the diners. Poor boy—what a fine *sous chef* he would have made! Unfortunately, he was unable to find inspiration in the field of gastronomy, as so many notable men have in their time. Had the great Lenin not had a taste for Swiss cuisine, we would no doubt be deprived of his exquisite definition of morality as "a fetishistic sauce for a useful meal!" This marvelously sublimated gastronomical phrase has led me to design an entire pastry program that—even though the course of world events is unfavorable to this tribute—in sacred homage I plan to patent as "Vladimir." *Noblesse oblige!*

But let us not lose our train of thought. Like all chemists of this place, Andrés was forced to choose between two options: pursuing advanced study abroad or becoming a taxi driver in Buenos Aires. Many of his friends chose the first option on the flow chart, which led to another country with good laboratories, world-class colleagues, abundant technology, and a standard of living that allowed for some untroubled leisure time. The aforementioned chart included various subroutines that brought the sequence to a "Stop," from which one could type "Go to 1" and return to Argentina. It also provided another path that led to a "Break" from which one could write "End of program," typically accompanied by a dull spouse, a couple of kids, and a pleasant group of neighbors wearing the latest style in shoes bought at a very good price. The second path, that of taxi driver, would have to be pursued amidst the ongoing conflicts of a country that seemed to be disappearing day by day. This part of the flow chart led to an "End" statement that was as final as retirement from the transport workers union.

His country had produced Nobel laureates in physiology, chemistry, and medicine, and it was interesting to watch the aristocratic airs of those scientists who, scorning the dignified craft of the taxi driver, opted for the first path on the flow chart. Argentina had been a world leader in other areas of cultural endeavor, but there again many opted for the first path. Those who pursued the field of dietetics abandoned their old habit of throwing unseasoned meat onto the grill. Now they ate on neat tablecloths and used the proper silverware. The art of coexistence had begun to take hold in them, as they became more comfortable with their role as entertainers at elegant banquets. Housebroken by life, they learned to keep their thoughts to themselves, as is proper for all civilized people. In this way, they managed to free themselves of the insolence that characterizes their countrymen, and inevitably provokes irritation wherever it is displayed. The same thing was taking place among the nation's athletes. With world-class teams in various sports, individual athletes were lured away by affluent cities abroad, decimating their teams. American films popularized music written by Argentine composers, and the Soviet Union put Argentine ideologues and militants on display like interesting imported goods.

To everyone's surprise, the country had managed to turn itself into a banana republic, gaining renown for its deterioration, illiteracy, and much else of that sort. It was interesting to see how Argentina came to be defined by rock musicals like "Evita," some third-rate skirmish with England near the South Pole, and its bloody military juntas. In any event, one had to exercise caution when dealing with those irresponsible locals who were busy widening the hole in the ozone layer right over their heads as they killed flies with bug spray, and polluted Antarctica with sardine cans, wine bottles, and condoms. To complete the picture of this strange people—whose corruption nearly outdid that of the Japanese, Americans, Greeks, and Italians—consider that their senior officials wore apish sideburns and dressed in a most outlandish manner. And a number of Argentina's leading athletes turned into criminals overnight—to the amazement of the international community, who somehow couldn't seem to remember a single documented instance of doping or irregularity involving their own national sports figures. No wonder Argentine teams were always booed at the World Cup, whether it was held in Mexico or in Italy! And given the open-minded and internationalist perspective for which sporting fans are renowned, there can be no doubt the reaction of that discerning public was justified.

But things were even worse from the point of view of the psychosocial behavior of Argentina's thirty million citizens. One had only to stand out in some small way to be suspected of criminal behavior. And if one person unwittingly helped another who happened to be under suspicion, he or she, too, joined the gallery of suspects. There, they understand things as they really are. As a result, if at night someone says, "It's night," or during the day, "It's day," windows in houses and apartments will fly open, loudspeakers blare, and police bullhorns ring out in angelic chorus, repeating, "What's going on here—what's behind all this?"—this "behindism" attesting to the astuteness of the singers. How Torricelli would have loved this vast vacuum chamber, where any pair of objects—a feather and a lead pipe, a genius and an imbecile—hit bottom with the same velocity!

In Buenos Aires, that capital of Psychoanalysis, the citizenry began to recover their old spark. Not to be outdone, Andrés took his turn visiting a shrink. The good doctor had him lie on the couch, and took careful notes of his patient's existential doubts, giving him advice in much the way a father advises his son. As a result, Andrés chose the second path on the flow chart.

It was getting dark as he left the office. He entered a bar and ordered coffee. As they looked at him suspiciously, he quickly corrected his mistake by asking for tea. They brought him a cup

of boiling water with a little yellow bag floating in it. He sipped the infusion with a timeless resignation. Wondering where the sound of the tango was coming from, he listened with a happiness he hadn't felt since he was a teenager in love for the first time:

> *"…a panorama of evil most insolent, that's the twentieth century it can't be denied. Here we are rolling about in a meringue. All of us bashed about, all together in the same crap. Go on, go on—don't hesitate; come what may, we're all bound for the oven anyway…"*

I arrived just in time to hear this doleful melody and to reflect on the philosophy it implied—that the twentieth century was the worst period in history, worse than that of the Cro-Magnons, worse than that of Java man or even the Neanderthals. And as for living in a mess, a glance at anyone from the Middle Ages could illustrate the point quite nicely. Nonetheless, there was something in all of this that touched me deeply. The idea of a sticky mess made me think of the great Australian singer, Melba. They say that at a reception she slipped and fell onto an elegantly spread table, dragging down with her the peaches, bananas, cherries, and ice cream. Regaining her composure, she picked up what was left of the mess and served it to the guests out of one large bowl, in a single stroke of genius inventing the now-famous *Peach Melba*. I also thought of that misunderstood English commander who, though deficient in the art of war, was ingenious enough to place food between two slices of bread. Lord Sandwich, that admiral of gastronomy, long may his name be praised! Finally, the reference to the oven in which we are all to eventually wind up made me realize how far we still are from assimilating the situation of human convergence. In short, I had before me an example of a reactionary chemist who, having rejected the idea of microwave cooking, opted to become a taxi driver.

I had only a brief opportunity to become acquainted with the city where Andrés lived, but I imagine that out in the countryside things must be quite different. There they dance the tango among the cactus, dressed like gauchos *à la* Rudolph Valentino, while all the young ladies shout, "Olé! Olé!" Everyone drinks *maté*, which means sipping cold pineapple juice from a gourd, to combat the tropical heat one finds in the region of Tierra del Fuego, "Land of Fire," as the name implies. And if I'm mistaken, it's of no great consequence, given the fact that a certain Mr. Reagan thought that Rio de Janeiro is in Bolivia, and some northern Europeans can't seem to find the "southern" nations on the map—overlooking the fact that there are other nations that lie even farther north than they. Beyond their geographical confusion, these windbags suffer from amnesia and are wholly lacking in any sensibility of future times. In short, my own faults pale in comparison with those of others about whom we see and hear every day. Of course, the leaders of the First World maliciously spread news of the errors committed by others so that their modest achievements might appear grander in comparison. As a result, one often hears prayers of the following sort among the less enlightened segments of the population: "I'm so thankful for our Government, which protects us from falling into the terrible state of affairs of those poor nations to the south, which we see daily on TV. Hallelujah, Amen!" All of this turns out to be good business for the government, the tabloid press, and those citizens who, in their righteous prayers, compensate for humiliations hidden in the corners of their little, post-industrial souls. But these calculated distractions should be corrected, because the civilized Western world—and that would have to include Japan—has a duty to limit its manipulation of images. It's

not as if something's gone wrong and now we must go hat in hand and beg the savages for help.

I wanted to maintain an appropriate distance while taking my leave of the taxi driver, but invading my personal space, he came right up to me and, pinching my cheeks between his fingers and thumbs, began shaking me. Refusing to let go, he said, with his breath reeking of alcohol, "Hey fatso, aren't you one sharp dude. This food scam of yours has got you more broads and bread than you know what to do with. Me, on the other hand—I'm just a cabby with nothing more than some shitty coffee and toast. Keep an eye out for the cops, you phony, and don't forget to send a little something my way, you hear me?"

I understood little of his peculiar argot, but I believe he was trying to express his respect for my profession. Then he hugged me, and for some reason felt obliged to bite the shoulder pad on my jacket. I think it was an allusion to a particular phrase—the meaning of which escapes me—that he had used in referring to me, which went something like, "Get lost—you and all that fancy crap you eat!" This was not the studious and taciturn Andrés I knew so well. This was Dr. Jekyll who, upon seeing me, had turned into Mr. Hyde, trying to scandalize me with his cutting remarks. He was showing his friendship through aggression. For lack of an arm to twist, he twisted words, turning the world upside down and challenging the cultural norms I represented. Deep inside he seemed to me an aesthete who took the surrealism of Buñuel and the grotesqueness of Fellini and mixed them together in the *lunfardo* slang of Argentina's capital. But it was over for good when that hapless boor left abruptly, calling me vile names punctuated by gestures that would make the roughest Liverpool pubmaster blush. What a horrible time, what an ordeal he put me through!

I left for the airport immediately. As I flew over the Pampas, I thought back over the last few days, trying to understand why Andrés and his countrymen had always looked on me with a certain suspicion. I knew that these fellows with their police-state mentality (Argentina, after all, invented the system for fingerprint identification) knew perfectly well what I thought of them on various occasions. I was afraid that if they regained a position of prominence—something that could happen at any time—they might be tempted to ban my recipes on the basis of some trumped-up, hygiene-related charges. Later, I managed to calm myself down by thinking about some of the pending engagements I had with people in the civilized world who were better able to appreciate my gourmet style. With a certain satisfaction I thought of the recipes of Chef Brillat-Savarin, now improved thanks to my computational gastronomy.

At a wave of my hand, the flight attendant brought me a cart overflowing with culinary delicacies. Flying among the rose-colored clouds, I settled back, ready to partake of a balanced repast. But a strange uneasiness began to grow in me, like something that would be inspired by discovering Mr. Hyde coming toward me in the rainy atmosphere of a tango. Hesitating for a moment, I asked my odalisques to bring me a bottle of red wine. I felt glass after glass rise to meet my lips as I slowly unrolled the parchments of dear old Omar Khayyám:

Life rushes by. What of Balj? What of Baghdad?
Let us drink down the overflowing cup, whether
bitter
or sweet. Drink! Long after we are gone
The moon will stay its long-fixed course.
A glass of red wine and a book of poems,
Only the basics, half a loaf, nothing more.

Some say Eden is bejeweled with houris.
I say the nectar of the grape is priceless.
Though distant drums be more seductive
I say, take what is at hand,
and scorn the promise of aught else.

The Case of Poe

As if through a looking glass
He surrendered, alone, to his complex fate.
Inventor of nightmares.
Perhaps from the other side of death,
He devises more solitary and powerful,
Splendid and atrocious marvels still.

"Edgar Allan Poe," Jorge Luis Borges

I have always believed that the fantasies woven by the authors of science fiction have their origins in embryonic concepts that are simply "in the air" at a given historical moment—ideas that affect the philosopher, and the scholar, as well as the artist. It seems obvious that the realization of many such premonitions owes more to the development of those nascent ideas than to any real perception of the future. Jules Verne, for example, calculated the position of the launch site for the first lunar mission with surprising accuracy. He also imagined the *Nautilus,* an undersea vehicle propelled by an energy that would only be harnessed by science years later. I could go on about Bulwer-Lytton and electricity, as well as a host of other writers who were amazingly accurate in their predictions. In the same way, many of today's writers will seem like visionaries when anti-gravity devices, light-powered transportation, and androids become practical realities.

I used to believe that attempting to explain these premonitions by taking the idea of precognition seriously was as ridiculous as attributing the simultaneous invention of the piano to a telepathic ability shared by Christofori and various of his contemporaries who, in 1718, were all working on developments to the clavichord. The fact that Le Verrier's mathematical calculations agreed with Galle's 1846 astronomical observations helped me to realize that the discovery of Neptune resulted from the combined efforts of a great many mathematicians and astronomers, all working in the same direction and guided by well-founded suspicions of the planet's existence, rather than through some occult compulsion.

I also considered that if I were to make a list of all the predictions these authors had made, both hits and misses, the column of incorrect predictions would be substantially longer than the column of correct ones—just as among the thousands upon thousands of books these authors have written the odds are very high that at least a few of their predictions would turn out to be correct. Indeed, it would be astounding if among all these visions of the future not a single one came true. In such cases, as so often occurs in our chance-ridden lives, the tendency is for one to remember only those predictions that do in fact come true. Even in our pessimism we want to claim credit when, out of all the events taking place around us, a predictable number of disasters occur.

Until now, that has been my way of looking at the world—I have relied on the calculation of probabilities whenever some new superstition has raised its head. For this reason I was skeptical of the attempt to turn Poe into some kind of literary sorcerer. Many of his readers were impressionable types who accepted his mesmerists, his vile ravens, and the eerie, morbid atmosphere of his stories as real. I had often heard tales of his clairvoyance, his ability to foretell

shipwrecks that later took place, his warnings about certain coffins that, when opened, would reveal the desperate evidence of suffocation and premature burial just as he had foreseen. Of all his stories, it was these to which I always had the greatest aversion.

But for some time now things have been different. On certain dismal nights, in dark places lit only by the fading glow of pale moonlight, I believed I could hear him breathing in that gloomy mansion, attempting to occasion events that would coincide with what he had written. At other times, I have thought of him not as a demon but as a creature caught in the snares of time, someone who wished to break through that dark web in order to save the lives of others. Today I believe that he knew the circumstances of events that had not yet occurred—events he was powerless to alter because their unfortunate protagonists had not yet even been born! I think Poe very much wanted someone to leave a clear account of the events that are recorded here. I have responded to his urgings, and am providing a record of these events—but with that I am breaking the unhealthy bond that has heretofore united us. When two radio operators at distant points and in different time zones sign off at the end of a conversation, it is customary for them to use the phrase, “Over and out.” Well then, I say, over and out, my dear, sad Mr. Poe. I know, I can feel it distinctly, that writing out these notes has allowed me to exorcise my childish obsession. Knowing the identity of the agonized voice that has pursued me since my youth, I am sure that in the future, whenever I go into an empty house, peer down a deep well, or enter a dark forest, that never again will I hear the haunting moan that calls out my name—“Reynolds, Reynolds.” To be sure, I will try to be near Margaret when she reads this incomprehensible tale, so that she might come to understand her own actions as the pretext for someone else’s will, like a simple antenna that somehow allows communication over enormous distances in space and time.

It all began at a social gathering.

“Have you read any Poe?” Margaret asked me in passing.

“Yes, when I was a child.”

“Well, if you read him carefully, you’ll see that he talks about you.”

“What do you mean, about me?”

“Yes, about Reynolds. That *is* your name, isn’t it?”

“Come, come. He could just as well be talking about Smith. What of it?”

“I don’t know. But the name’s there.”

A few days later I consulted an index of names in a collection of the complete works of Poe. I could find no reference to the name “Reynolds.” I realized that Margaret had been mistaken, but by that time I had already obtained a number of Poe biographies and my curiosity was piqued. While agreeing on most aspects of his anguished life, the biographies differed considerably as to the circumstances of his death. In the end, I was left with four possible scenarios.

I

“On the death of his wife, Poe began to suffer attacks of *delirium tremens*, brought about by his frequent inebriation. One day in October of 1849, he was found in the throes of death, lying on the railroad tracks.”

II

"On the day when the unity of his life was shattered by the death of his wife, who had succumbed to tuberculosis, the poet found that he no longer had the strength to go on living. Bowed by the weight of mourning, his creative powers exhausted, he managed to outlive her by only two years. During a round of lectures in Baltimore, they found him by the first light of an October morning as he lay dying in the middle of the street."

III

"By chance he found himself in Baltimore, having stopped over on a trip from Richmond to Fordham, New York, in preparation for his upcoming marriage to Sarah Elmira Royster, his childhood sweetheart, whom he was to wed after losing his first wife, Virginia Clemm."

IV

"In September of 1849, he arrived in Baltimore en route to Philadelphia. The delay that stopped the train in this city would in the end prove fatal to him. On September 29, in a deplorable state of drunkenness, he visited a friend. Five days later—days that remain a complete mystery and a gap in his biography—another acquaintance was informed that someone 'who might be Mr. Poe' had been found drunk and unconscious in a tavern in a seedy section of Baltimore. Being an election year, it was customary for vote-seekers to buy free rounds for potential voters. Imbibing these electoral drinks may well have been the last thing that Poe elected to do. With his death imminent Poe was taken to the hospital."

I continued to track down clues, hunches, and biographical references until I was able to piece together a picture of Poe's death that was worthy of the poet himself. The truth is this. On September 29, 1849, he arrives in Baltimore. It is not certain that he visits a friend on that day, or that a political group is in any way responsible for his demise. Several days pass for which we cannot account, and then on October 3 he is found unconscious on the floor of a Lombard Street tavern. From there he is taken to Washington Hospital. Delirious to the end, he calls out on various occasions for someone named "Reynolds." He dies at three in the morning on the seventh, at the age of forty. Perhaps to cleanse itself of some guilt of which it was unaware, the city of Baltimore erects a monument to Poe on November 17, 1875.

Among these conflicting statements, I was able to ascertain that in his final moments Poe called out repeatedly, demanding to see someone named "Reynolds." That name, which confirmed Margaret's vague recollection, led me to something that was more extraordinary than any of the other circumstances surrounding the author's death.

My reasoning was elementary. Let us assume, I told myself, that this anguished request for someone apparently named Reynolds is in fact significant. Who, then, was this person? The only Reynolds to be found in relation to the life and works of Poe was the arctic explorer whose writings Poe drew on when composing part of his only novel, *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym of Nantucket.* Beyond that I could advance no further. I tried immersing myself in the mode of thought Poe himself had tried to communicate in that strange book he titled *Eureka.* In that most unusual work, in the midst of a discussion of Aristotle's deductive method and Baconian induction, Poe, perhaps anticipating Bergson, opened the door to what he called "intuition." In

truth, I knew that this method could not be defended, but it did represent a definite way of thinking and feeling, no doubt the creative form that Poe himself employed. Following this thread, I found myself in a rather dizzying position, one in which I tried to recreate Poe's own mental habits. I mulled over the events surrounding the scene in which Reynolds' name is invoked and plunged myself deeply into a study of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym.*

The most striking scene in the novel follows the wreck of the brig *Grampus.* Adrift and on the point of perishing for lack of food and water, the remaining four survivors decide to draw lots.

> Peters at length took me by the hand, and I forced myself to look up, when I immediately saw by the countenance of Parker that I was safe, and that he it was who had been doomed to suffer. Gasping for breath, I fell senseless to the deck.
>
> I recovered from my swoon in time to behold the consummation of the tragedy in the death of him who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing it about. He made no resistance whatever, and was stabbed in the back by Peters, when he fell instantly dead. I must not dwell upon the fearful repast which immediately ensued. Such things may be imagined, but words have no power to impress the mind with the exquisite horror of their reality. Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet, and head, throwing them together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal, during the four ever memorable days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of the month.

Richard Parker drew the short straw and was immediately sacrificed. His three friends lived off his body for several days. Eventually the schooner Jane Guy rescued them. These events were set in July of 1827.

Not knowing where to turn since I didn't know what I was looking for, I continued to search for further background information, just as I had done in the matter of Reynolds. *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* had been published in New York in 1838, and I was determined to find the source for this scene. This done, I would move on to other scenes in the book, uncover still more background information, and so on until I had made my way through the entire novel.

I didn't have far to go. I found only two other accounts of cannibalism related to shipwrecks. The first occurred in 1685 on St. Christopher in the Antilles. A group of shipwreck survivors drew lots and, as a result of this little escapade, devoured one of their companions. Following their rescue, they were tried and hanged. Poe could have used this case as the inspiration for his story, but the brushstrokes seemed too broad. I forged ahead with the second case and, much to my surprise, it turned out to be not only the inspiration for the story, but a real event that he had shamelessly plagiarized.

The yacht *Mignonette* is shipwrecked. Four survivors find themselves dying of hunger and thirst. Thinking it over, they decide to draw lots, but end up changing their minds, when they realize that one of them has no dependents. And so they kill Richard Parker, living off his flesh for several days until they are rescued by the vessel *Montezuma.* Needless to say, this event takes place in the month of July. They stand trial, but their lives are spared due to the special circumstances of the case.

The source was clear, down to the tiniest details. For example, one of the survivors in the novel—our protagonist Gordon Pym—does not agree to the murder. In the real case there was

a sailor named Brooks who also did not support the scheme and, though he did join in the feast, he was not tried. In the end, the symmetries—the number of participants and their attitudes, their subsequent rescue, the month in which the events occurred, even the fact that in both cases the victim was named Richard Parker—suggested more than mere coincidence. However, although I was now certain beyond any doubt of the source Poe had used for his story, I still remained in the dark regarding the importance he seemed to attach to the name Reynolds at the hour of his death. Certainly my discovery was interesting. I had managed to track it down by following an intuition linked to that mental tendency I thought I had glimpsed in Poe's work. Still, I was unable to discover the reason for his extreme altered state in the final days of his life. What was he conveying with such anguish? It seemed to me that the key to this question was to be found in the novel. I plodded on, unable to find the answer.

Determined to get to the bottom of it, I went searching for the book in which the case of the *Mignonette* is cited. Unable to locate it in any bookstore, I finally found it in the British Museum. I searched for the date on which the event had taken place. When at last I found it, I couldn't help but experience the icy chill that so often runs up the spines of Poe's characters: July—1884! The real events had taken place thirty-five years after the poet's death, forty-four years following publication of the first edition of *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,* and fifty-seven years after the date on which Poe's story is set! This made no sense at all.

I consulted the newspapers of the time and found the stories relating to the trial. I made photocopies of the *Flying Post* out of Devon from November 3 and 6, 1884, and the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* from November 7, 1884. Digging still deeper, I obtained permission to make copies of the court records in which a number of new details appeared. For example, the *Mignonette* displaced nineteen tons. It was shipwrecked some 1,600 nautical miles from Cape Town. The only surviving crew members were the captain, Thomas Dudley; the first mate, Stephens, who was thirty-one years old; and a sailor named Brooks, who was thirty-eight. With them was Richard Parker, a boy of seventeen. The latter drank seawater and became seriously ill. Finally, after three weeks they decided that one of them must die, and Dudley ran a knife through Parker. At the trial, the jury was unable to reach a verdict, and the case went before the Royal Court in London. The men were freed after paying fines of fifty and one hundred pounds respectively.

There was, of course, the possibility of a whole chain of after-the-fact falsifications, involving newspaper accounts and court records to make it seem that the real events coincided with the novel. So once again I began my search for an explanation, this time starting from the other end. I turned to the *Southern Literary Messenger* out of Richmond, Virginia, the monthly magazine managed by Poe and edited by Thomas W. White. I consulted the issues of January and February 1837 in which Poe's work had been published. Then I examined the 1838 New York edition of the novel and the many editions that followed, right up until the time of the real case in 1884. In all of them, the events and circumstances remained the same.

Once more I went over the facts. For several days before his death, all traces of the poet were lost. He then reappeared in our dimension in a state of delirium, calling out for Reynolds, in an attempt to alter the events Poe had foreseen. But this was doubly impossible, for Reynolds had predeceased him, while the protagonists of the tragedy had not yet even been born. No doubt Poe was delirious—or is it that he was desperate to give evidence of these events that had not yet transpired? If that was the case the poet chose well when he selected Margaret to communicate his message to me, a message-in-a-bottle he had launched onto the waves of time some 140 years earlier, in Baltimore, on the day of his death, October 3, 1849.

Fictions

Software and Hardware

Oh, Newton, Newton, what would you have dreamed
had you eaten the apple instead?

Dear Michel:

In a few minutes I will be leaving the Olympic Village in Oslo. I hope you will think of me as a good friend, even though I shocked you, as you once confessed, with my "monstrous" behavior. I am placing in your hands the fragments of this memoir, hoping that you will find in them a few of the many explanations I owe you. I do this out of gratitude for the considerable amount of time you were forced to put up with me, your most unusual and incomprehensible student.

Today I must congratulate you for having produced the greatest gymnast of all time! In the future, as you find your students unable to surpass my achievements, please try not to be too hard on them. Neither these kids nor any other gymnast will ever be able to improve upon what I've done—of that you can be sure—well, almost sure. *Au revoir!*

The Absurdity of Universal Gravitation

As always, there was the Law of Gravity. But I knew that there would come a time, even if it was only once, when this little formula for descent, $g = 9.78\ m/s^2$—could be overcome. Among the laws that govern falling bodies, I was particularly interested in those related to space and velocity. The first of these laws stated: *the distance traveled is proportional to the square of the time elapsed.* The second said: *the velocity reached is proportional to the time elapsed during descent.* As a result, I spent a fair amount of time investigating this scientific absurdity—from those experiments with inclined planes and Atwood's machines right up to modern nuclear physics. In the beginning there were dirigibles and airplanes. Next there were rockets capable of leaving the Earth's orbit, and then Minkovsky's ion propulsion device. Now we find ourselves with superconductors and opposing electromagnetic fields that portend the invention of an antigravity device. From Leonardo's flying machine through the first experiments of the Wright brothers I could see a common thread that had begun in our dreams and eventually wound its way into our works of fiction. It was easy for me to understand both Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* and Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*—books by writers who were aviators in their extra-literary lives and who shared the obsession with liberating themselves from $g = 9.78\ m/s^2$.

I also came across Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. The author—citing Swift, who flew to the moon, and Cyrano, who made the island of Laputa float using a magnet—recommends "lightness" to future generations of writers. He also mentions Kundera, and claims to see the inescapable weight of living in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In concluding, he states that while it is true that *software* cannot exercise its powers of lightness

except through the weight of *hardware,* he goes on to say that nonetheless it is software that gives the orders, acting on both the outside world and the machine. Taken to its ultimate consequences, this idea would have forced him to categorize as “de-natured” the school of thought that considers the human body as mere hardware in the employ of intelligent software. Calvino, like all intellectuals, was unfamiliar with the body in a practical sense and unaware that through work on it the body was fully capable of achieving the lightness he sought.

The Machine Begins to Work

As a child I was taken to gymnastics exhibitions and competitions, but I wasn’t yet old enough to be admitted to a program. As a result, I was forced to waste countless hours doing those ridiculous Danish exercises and Swedish drill as well as calisthenics—and all of it seemed to be led by teachers perfectly suited to the task at hand. They were either fat, bald, and old, or they would show up in a T-shirt, worn-out tennis shoes, and over-sized shorts that came down to their knees. No doubt it was out of these experiences that I developed my aversion to certain kinds of sportswear: golf knickers and riding pants, along with the shorts worn by soccer players and fat-assed rugby players. This attire would eventually resurface in the form of those horrible Bermuda shorts and their cousins, the culottes. What an eye-opener it was for me years later when I met a group of Danish champions who were critical of Danish gymnastics, an American team that made fun of Bermuda shorts, and some female German gymnasts who detested culottes. “It’s just common sense,” I told myself, once again reconciled with the Universe.

One day after my class in what was called “physical education,” I hid in the locker room. Sneaking down hospital-like corridors, I came to a flight of stairs, which I began to climb. Eventually I found myself on a balcony used for viewing the competitions. In the darkness I could make out a wide set of bleachers. I sat in a corner, invisible, gazing down on the main gym, which was off limits to me. What a vision of paradise! Walls lined with enormous mirrors, ropes, trapezes, uneven bars, parallel bars, side horses, rings, and springboards. It had everything—mats as far as the eye could see, trampolines to make you soar with each leap, padded pits to break your fall after a dangerous somersault. But most important of all was the top-ranked team standing around the coach, who was yelling like a madman: “The scoring system is based on strength, speed, balance, rhythm, stamina, reflexes, and style. If you haven’t worked on all those things, you’ll lose tenths of a point—that’s right, you’ll lose. You—you sack of potatoes! Gymnastics isn’t like other sports where you add up goals or points or anything. Here they take away points. Points for mistakes *you* make.”

Several months went slowly by, but finally my birthday arrived. That same day, flashing my ID card at the gatekeeper, I watched the door swing open before me as I made my triumphant entrance. As if with sweet morning air I filled my lungs with the smell of wax, chalk, resin, and mats. I had barely stepped onto the shiny wood floor when a hand lifted me into the air by the seat of my pants. “Where’re your stirrup pants, kid?” he barked, and in a flash I was out on the street. Later I would make them pay for that little birthday present! The next day I repeated my attempt, and this time no one noticed me.

That was the first time I began to train seriously under the guidance of a coach. He put me in the class known as the “junior beginners level.” Under his direction, our group of twenty apprentices competed with each other, trying to avoid being cut from the group. After six months, only five of the original group remained. We moved on to a new coach, and our first one got a new batch. The five of us found ourselves in a semicircle around our new tormentor,

who looked us up and down, one at a time. “Where’re your stirrup pants, kid?” he barked at me. So I pulled the stirrups down from where they were tucked up inside my pants and slipped them under my shoes.

“Now give me your names. No last names. We go by first names here. Name, age, and experience.”

“René, seven and a half, two years at this *stuff*.”

The teacher’s eyes opened wide. When I again called my previous experience “stuff,” refusing to call it gymnastics, it was as if his heart suddenly melted. I quickly became his favorite student, practicing twice as hard as everyone else and all too often serving as an example of what not to do. That challenge helped me more than any training. From the start, I appreciated his tough treatment, devoid of any sugar-coated hypocrisy. In the end, they wanted champions, and I wanted my body to become the plaything nearest at hand.

The Retard and the Fly

From the time I was born until the age of four I was considered retarded. My reflexes were no good. I had to do the simplest things over and over. I could never do anything until I understood it thoroughly. Let’s say that I wanted to pick up a block. No matter how many times I tried, it would always come out the same way—wrong. I had to repeat everything over and over again, as if for the first time. As a result, it took me a long time to learn to talk. I remember my parents coaxing me to say “mama” and “dada.” But I saw only their huge mouths, heard their sounds, and sensed their strange wishes.

One day a fly landed briefly on my face, and then flew away. I felt a difference between the sensation it left with me and the one the insect took away with it through the air. I saw it take off, and decided I could catch it. I did this with such speed that the nurse on duty ran to tell everyone the good news. When I began to walk at the age of three, I made such rapid progress that before long I was able to keep my balance in some of the most unlikely places. I believe that much the same thing happened with my ability to speak. Only when I was ready and sensed the anxious atmosphere around me did I set in motion the machinery of language, my speed and fluency increasing daily.

At that time the “maturation” theory of the nervous system was then in vogue. They concluded that I was normal but was a “late bloomer,” maturing at a slower rate than normal. In order to prevent me from relapsing into idiocy, I was taken to classes in diction, drama, music, and calisthenics. If the intention of these well-meaning people was to have me fit into the education system, it simply didn’t work—until my fourth birthday it hadn’t been possible because I was retarded. But by the time I was five, it was too late—I had already picked up the most important skills on my own. When I did start school I relapsed into that dreaded imbecility, because I couldn’t for the life of me figure out how “one plus one” equaled “two.” To be honest, I still don’t get it. How can you possibly say that two different representations are the same thing? It’s a total mystery to me. The situation got a little better when they explained to me that it wasn’t that they were the *same* but rather “equivalent,” and I began to understand the set of conventions they were using.

But one problem persisted. They couldn’t get me to pay attention to a lesson on national heroes, for example, if my teacher presented the material as a lecture. While supposedly studying history from the age of the mollusks through the rise of Napoleon, I was instead completely lost in the teacher’s tone of voice, gestures, movements, and emotional quirks.

Some time later I managed to overcome this by teaching myself how to write with both hands. With my left hand I would summarize the lectures, while with my right I jotted down notes on every breath and muscle movement my teacher made. Eventually, I could do this without writing anything down. With time, I was able to attend simultaneously to what an individual was expressing as well as the particularities of their situation, even though both were, of course, presented as a single whole.

Adrenaline and Greek Tragedy

At school I threw myself into all the games, pushing myself to the limit, while surrounded by plodding classmates who tired easily. Until I was seven I was interested in every sport. But when I started the “junior beginners level” class in gymnastics, I began to dismiss thoughts of the fibrous muscle of the athlete, the long, slow-twitch muscle of the swimmer, and the bulk of the boxer or weightlifter. The only thing I still had any respect for was the height that could be achieved in the pole vault and in high diving. In the former, it was a question of rising into the air with the aid of a pole. In the latter, one did twists and turns while plummeting down like a lead weight. It was clear that each sport produced different muscular development from the others, enhancing one part of the body at the expense of the others. Gymnastics was the only sport that did what I wanted, involving as it did not only a strict diet and a balance of hours of daily training with adequate sleep, but also the precision of a program for mastering the body.

With appropriate modifications it was an approach that was applicable to a wide range of activities. Yet my drama or music teachers would have thought that it was only another of my jokes if I’d told them that what I really wanted was to use a rigorous training program to turn my body into a finely-tuned instrument. They couldn’t understand that even my jokes all pointed in this same direction. That’s why, whether polishing a dramatic role for the stage or jumping around the staves in composing a piece of music, what I was really doing was fine-tuning my muscles and becoming conscious of each internal organ. Once, while playing Jason in Euripides’ *Medea*, I delivered the following lines at the end of the play: “O Zeus, hear how I am mocked and driven hence by this savage she-lion, polluted by the blood of her own young. Yet so far as I may and can, I raise for them this lament, and do adjure the gods to witness how you have slain my sons, and now will not suffer me to bury or even touch their dead bodies.” Why did the audience applaud my performance with such enthusiasm? I’ll tell you why: It was because I knew how to turn glucose, insulin, adrenaline, and other hormones into dramatic expression.

From music I gained an understanding of the inner rhythm of movement. At first, it served as a metronome to keep time for the front scissors, back scissors, and double leg circles on the horse. Then I began humming a few melodies as I did my routine on the rings. Later, I progressed to using selections from Orff for the compulsory routines in a competition. In the end, for the optional routines in my program, my body was carrying out dodecaphonic orders in which every muscle was a different instrument, harmonizing in a single symphony.

It seemed to me that the Soviets were up to something similar. Watching slow-motion videos day after day, I recognized the machine-like tempo of Prokovief in their movements. They were still at the physical stage, using music as an objective support. They had not yet grasped the mental function that transferred the musical image into bodily movement. Simply put, I’d say they worked with perception, while day after day I was externalizing representation. Nevertheless, their team was ahead of its time in introducing dance movements into more

traditional approaches. At first, their introduction of these techniques in competition met with some resistance from Western judges, but with time the Soviets made significant inroads, until they were sweeping meet after meet. As a result of this influence, and with the arrival of artistic gymnastics for women, the Romanian female gymnasts ended up inventing the takeoff that stunned the world.

By age thirteen I was junior champion in all categories, and was already learning how to be less dependent on visual perception. Blindfolded, I would move from one apparatus to another, judging distances only by means of my internal senses—senses upon which music was already having an effect. It was around this time that I learned that the run-up used to gain speed for both the horse and floor exercises should not be done on the tips of the toes as traditionally taught. Instead, it should be performed from a flat-footed position with a forward motion, the legs describing imaginary circles that decrease in diameter as a function of the distance to the point of takeoff. And the jump itself should be done in a heel-foot-toe sequence, producing that long and suspended leap previously seen only in dancers like Nijinsky, which the ballet critics of his time had called “impossible flights.” Well, they weren’t really flights but movements involving everything from the abductors, rectals, and thigh muscles to the annular ligaments of the tarsus.

Stamina was another important factor that I managed to perfect. I built up my ability to use oxygen, eliminate carbon dioxide and lactic acid, and increase the performance of certain heavily-taxed organs such as my lungs, heart, liver, and kidneys. Based on the principle of interval and duration, I worked on my general anaerobic endurance as understood by Hegedüs. I gained an overall resistance to oxygen debt, which was useful for speed and sudden exertion, as opposed to gaining stamina limited to a particular group of muscles. After studying the behavior of various athletes, I became convinced that oxygen debt in the brain caused by poor training techniques had the effect of decreasing certain abilities. For that reason I concentrated on becoming adept at producing a type of breathing in which I let air flow in continuously through my nose and out between my teeth, like a pendulum accompanying my every movement. Nor did I allow my heart to exceed what I call “the threshold of aerobic breakdown,” which I calculated to be 180 beats per minute.

Paranoia Won’t Get You Very Far!

From time to time either the National Sports Committee or my wonderful teacher Michel would ask me to speak to the gymnasts on one of the national teams. This time it was the team traveling to Brussels to compete in the divisional championship.

At the main gym, I began talking to the group of athletes who were seated in a semi-circle around me. They listened and took notes as I outlined the classical ideas for scoring high marks in what the judges call style. From this perspective, style consists of straight lines in the hands and the feet, thighs together, head up, shoulders down, entrances and exits clearly marked.

I added that this was only the outward appearance of gymnastics. The Greeks, who invented the Olympics, located the soul within the body. And so it followed that Greek philosophers developed their ideas in the gymnasia, the same place that the painters and sculptors also found their inspiration. To them, the body was not simply a natural object, as in the case of animals—it was there to be humanized. But soon I cut my talk short, noting an impatience in my young prima donnas that arose from their arrogance. Nothing I had to say was worth listening to if it didn’t speak directly to their immediate interests. And of course, all of them felt they should be acknowledged as the exceptional individuals they knew themselves to be.

So there I was with a bunch of conceited brats who saw themselves as superhuman. I knew very well that in their muddled minds the impossible dream of the champions was beginning to take shape. It went something like this: If you could only learn to produce slower falls, then you could add increasingly complex moves to any routine. Something similar took place with virtuosos in other fields. Houdini, for example, trained ever more intensively to escape confinements of every kind, in an effort to move beyond certain physical limits. In his case it was a struggle against the law of the impenetrability of solid bodies—just as in the case of our gallant friends it was a struggle against $g = 9.78\ m/s^2$. In an attempt to mitigate the effects of this paranoia, I tried to discourage them from this dream that, at least for them, was unattainable.

I gave them the following explanation: “A mass rotating in a circular motion tends to fly outward from its axis, the centrifugal force being proportional to the square of the speed of rotation. At the equator, the centrifugal force due to the Earth’s rotation is 1/289 the size of g. Since 289 is the square of 17, then if the speed of rotation becomes 17 times faster than that of the Earth, this movement will counterbalance g. The Earth’s rotational speed is 1,665 kilometers per hour—so an additional speed of at least 28,305 kilometers per hour is required to overcome gravity sufficiently to orbit the Earth. Now then, my friends, when you do a giant swing on the horizontal bar, what average speed do you attain? Perhaps 60 kilometers per hour. That force is essentially all centrifugal, since the bar exerts almost no gravitational pull. If you weigh 75 kilos, at 60 kilometers per hour the force on the bar is equal to 300 kilos. So in the salto of your dismount, you can reach a height much greater than the bar itself, and do a triple in a tuck position or a double in a layout. Note that there’s a dead point where you’re neither rising nor falling. When does this occur? Logically, it would be in the middle of the triple tucked salto or the double in a layout. And what’s your height at that point? Of course it would be above the bar. At that instant your body weight is zero. But gravity will pull you to the floor in just over a second since you’re at a point no higher than 9.78 meters. “Well then, my beautiful cherubs, how can you ever hope to fly under these impossible conditions? To begin with, you would have to be able to do six twists in a tuck or four in a layout, and that would be possible only if you achieved a velocity of 120 kilometers per hour. On top of that, your weight would increase to 1,200 kilos, and you would have to be able to hold on to the bar without letting go too soon. And then, from a height of more than nine meters above the ground, plunging to the floor like a piano. On the second rotation, if you built up too much twist, the forces would break down—something like what happens with a gyroscope when the centrifugal force becomes equal to g. And your rotations would be at a speed that would rip off your clothes and break every last bone in your body. Then there’s the elasticity of the bar itself which, while it may help with the release, will still leave you back on the floor in little more than a second. And to make matters worse, no one’s ever been able to do more than a double twisting dismount in a layout. Consequently, the one second descent time will never be broken. So save your dreams—dreams that have haunted the world’s greatest gymnasts. Save them for when you lay your thick skulls down on your pillows at night. Forget about the myth of prolonging that moment of suspension. That’s all I have to say!”

They looked at me with hatred in their eyes—the same hatred I’ve seen in physicists when you rub their noses in the 299,792 kilometers per second limit of the speed of light. Everyone knows it. They teach it to all their students. Still, does that give anyone the right to go around pointing it out in public? No doubt a little voice inside tells them that someday that limit will be broken. Physicists, unlike gymnasts, don’t usually let anyone in on their secret desires, unless in a careless moment they reach out and take a bite out of Newton’s sparkling apple or Röemer’s

celestial ones (depending on whether the question has to do with gravitation or the speed of light).

When I finished my presentation, I took out a digital dynamometer that I had built, and hooked up the terminals to the support for the bar. I asked them to watch the meter carefully for the expected increase in weight with increasing speed. Then I hung from the bar. Rising into a vertical position, I began to perform a giant swing, and had them read the meter out loud. In unison, they recited: “280… 290… 150… 90… 50…”

My release was the usual double twisting salto, and I nailed my landing on the mat. However, according to the meter, as my rate of spin increased my weight *decreased*—which, of course, was absurd. No one said anything. It was obvious that they all thought there was something wrong with the meter. They simply adjusted the figures and wrote them down—and with that, this theoretical and practical lesson came to an end.

That Strange Vibration

For a long time I dedicated myself to turning my body into a kind of sonic image. Every cell inside me, pulsing from within, would send a vibration—first to the bar, then to the turnbuckles, from there to the floor, and finally to the walls and even the air in the gymnasium. It was a question of translating the spirit of music into the most beautiful expression of physical elegance. Like a guitar that vibrates excitedly to the pulsing strings, transmitting its voice and resonating with other objects as well as the human ear, my body became the instrument. And in transmitting the vibration to nearby bodies, the source of the emissions is pushed backwards.

Which brings us to the present point in time, in which the Olympics have become an artistic event. I won’t go over everything that took place on the day that I received the highest possible scores on every apparatus. I’ll just tell you how it all ended, which to my mind was the best part.

Facing the silent crowd, the expectant judges, the other gymnasts, and the attention of millions of television viewers, I walked slowly to the bar. I ran my foot over a block of resin, so that my shoes wouldn’t slip as they left the mat. I rubbed chalk on my hands to absorb any perspiration. Marking my starting point and taking a deep breath, I hung from the bar and began. Within a few seconds I had run through the set of exercises and was coming to the end of my routine. From a vertical position I started the giant swing. By the ninety-degree mark I was already fully in tune. At 180 degrees, waves began to emanate from deep within me out to all my muscles. At 270 degrees, the bar began to quiver following my internal representation. At 360 degrees I was vertical again, and a wave expanded through the turnbuckles to the floor of the gymnasium. I began the second turn at a tremendous rate of speed while *inverting* my mental mechanisms as follows: *“.ecrof lagufirtnec ym htiw emocrevo I taht eno eht si stnuoc that ecrof lanoitativarg ylno eht dna ,sixa ym si rab eht ecnis elttil srettam ,(I ^{2}nis 99170500.0 + 75520199.0) x2 = g ,I ,edutital eht fo enis eht fo erauqs eht ot noitaler ni elop eht ot rotauqe s’htraE eht morf sesaercni hcihw ,g noitarelecca ni egnahc ehT .$^{2-}$(R/a + 1) g = ^{2}(R/a + 1) / g = ‘g hcihw morf ,^{2}(a + R) : ^{2}R :: g : ‘g—sesaerced thgiew ym elihw deeps ym esaercni I ;drawkcab sevom egami ym elihw drawrof sevom ydob ym seerged ytenin tA”*

At 180 degrees, I had already begun the symphony selected for the occasion. I knew it would be easily recognizable to the audience. “A small concession,” I thought. “But it’s good that everyone can enjoy themselves.” At that moment, as I was performing my calculations, I had already rapidly previewed the third movement of the symphony and was approaching the fourth, having moved ahead of the baritone and the four voices. The bar trembled. The turnbuckles, the

floor, and the walls began to amplify the signal, which explains why I replaced the chorus with brasses after the long pause in this mental score. Changing to F major, Beethoven's *Choral* exploded with a luminous sound in which it was impossible to recognize either chorus or conventional brasses. The entire space was flooded with music. The audience leaped to their feet as if their seats were spring-loaded. The judges' papers flew into the air and several gymnasts fell over backwards, banging their rear ends on the mats, the floor, and the chalk containers. I passed through the 360 degree position for the second time, rejoicing in Schiller's ridiculous "Ode to Joy," which Beethoven had set to music: *"The cherub stands in the presence of God! But even to the miserable worm ecstasy is granted."* However, the syntax in the original German is completely different: *"Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben und der Cherub steht vor Gott."* The beautiful cherubs were strewn across the floor like miserable little worms, their asses powdered with chalk.

Finally, at 270 degrees into the second rotation I released and, spinning like a top in a rapid series of twists, somersaulted in a layout, repeating the move three times, until I reached the dead point more than ten meters above the ground. Then I began to descend like one of those space capsules floating gently down to the surface of the moon. It took five long seconds for my feet to land on the mat and my routine to end. Taking advantage of the astonishment of the crowd, I quickly slipped out, as someone cried, "Turn down that music! You've ruined a perfectly incredible performance with those speakers blasting away! What idiots!"

Now I'm back in my room, finishing this letter with my right hand while I attempt to penetrate the wooden surface of the desk with the index finger of my left hand. I ask myself: Must I accept the law of impenetrability simply because perception tells me that one body cannot occupy the same space as another?

The Huntress

The Radio Telescope on Monte Tlapán

It was 9:00 P.M., and the alarm in her watch beeped softly as Shoko Satiru, the director of the observatory, finished her work for the day. Changing out of her work clothes, she remembered that Pedro would be arriving shortly. For almost two years now she had repeated the same routine every Tuesday. She finished entering the settings for the radio telescope, and like a creature shedding its bright yellow skin, slipped out of her overalls. Fixing her hair, she compared her Asian features with those in the photo she had carefully placed in one corner of the mirror. She never ceased to admire that Aztec face, so like her own.

The image of *The Huntress*, as the archeologists called her, had been sculpted into solid stone some seven hundred years earlier. The figure was female, viewed in profile. In one hand she held a rectangular object, from which protruded a thin rod. Scholars had identified it as a hunting dagger. As for the other details, no one could provide any reasonable explanation for her strange clothing. However they did note that the plumed headdress was like those worn by the ancient Aztecs—though to the untrained eye it merely resembled windblown hair.

Shoko had first met Pedro at the site of the archeological dig. Presenting her with a photograph of *The Huntress,* he had murmured slowly, “Now I know who you are.” That phrase was the beginning of a wonderful relationship.

Shoko prepared herself for another evening in town with her companion. In a moment she would hear the crunching of tires on gravel as the car strained up the final hill that ended in the observatory’s parking lot. The security guard would watch on closed-circuit TV as Pedro approached the entrance. Pedro would chat briefly with him through the speaker, and soon Pedro and Shoko would be together below, enveloped in the warm, starry night.

But this time their Tuesday ritual was disrupted. Skipping his usual small-talk with the guard, Pedro climbed directly up the steps to the dome. The metal door opened and he entered quickly.

“You’ve got to fix this, Shoko. If we send it to the city, it will take them days to get it working right. You’ve got all the tools you need here and you know how to do it. Without this remote control we’ll have to open and close the gate at the dig by hand.”

“Sure,” she said, “of course.” Turning down the sound coming from the telescope’s monitors, she took the remote to a workbench. Instinctively, she took her yellow overalls down off the hook and in a few seconds was back in them. Pushing her hair out the way, she began working on the piece of equipment.

“It’s a short circuit,” she muttered. The defect was obvious in the waveform visible on the oscilloscope. As she changed the damaged transistor, Pedro’s fantasy wandered from lips and breath to skin and the burning depths of bodies meeting.

“We’re going to have to readjust the transmission frequencies so it will operate at four meters, two centimeters, and five millimeters.” A brilliant telecommunications engineer, she worked with that singular focus that had made her so valued by the company back in Japan. “Imagine, this primitive toy is made out of transistors, without even a single chip. It works only up to a distance of a couple of meters, while our radio telescopes receive signals from

thousands of light years away. Four meters, two centimeters, five millimeters. Just over 168 megahertz—there. Done!"

Extending the antenna on the remote control, she pushed the "on" button. Immediately, the lights in the laboratory flickered. A dull thud could be heard coming from the dome's motors, and the parabolic antenna of the radio telescope began to rotate slowly, searching for a message from the distant stars. The lights in the dome grew dim as the monitors suddenly brightened. Perhaps because of these contrasting effects, Pedro had the sensation that he was losing Shoko down a stroboscopic tunnel. Caught up in an electric blue wind, she seemed to be moving away into the distance, with the remote control still in her hand. At that moment, all twenty monitors came back to life, each displaying the profile of *The Huntress*.

The people brought rushing into the dome by the power failure were stopped short and stood dumbfounded in front of the screens. Eventually they turned their attention to regaining control of the radio telescope, but with the main power out it was impossible to move the telescope. Telephones rang, and with the help of the other observatories they were eventually able to confirm that the transmission of the human figure had originated right there—at the radio telescope of Monte Tlapán itself. The network of observatories around the world was connected so that an image detected at one location was simultaneously displayed at all other points in the network. Despite the brownout, Monte Tlapán had continued transmitting to its sister stations. But what was unclear was the original source of the image of *The Huntress*. Eight minutes after the initial disturbance, the normal flow of electricity was restored, and with it the image vanished. Once again the twenty monitors bore the traces of stellar objects arriving from the other radio telescopes.

After Shoko changed out of her overalls, Pedro followed her as she walked quickly down to the parking lot. As they drove off, her grip tightened nervously on the remote and the photograph she had retrieved from the dome. In the warm, starry night, the vehicle began its descent toward the distant lights of the town.

Fragile Memory

They didn't speak until they had entered the large, rambling house. "I saw a series of flashing lights, like the strobe lights in dance clubs that make the dancers' movements seem to jerk in a series of freeze frames. But in this case, it was your silhouette that seemed to be moving quickly away from me into the distance, to the rhythm of blue flashing lights." "How can that be, Pedro? The frequency was almost sixteen cycles per second. Our monitors can't display a signal in that range."

"Maybe. But I do know that I smelled a strong odor of ozone at the same time that I was feeling myself being pushed away from you by some kind of wind."

"You're not making any sense. I can't understand what you're saying," cried Shoko, almost hysterical. Pedro gently put his arm around her and slowly continued, "You were moving away from me down a long tunnel. It didn't last more than two or three seconds, but when you came back and I saw you with the remote in your hand, I could tell that you were *The Huntress*. It's not just a cute phrase anymore, like it was in the beginning. For two years we haven't spoken about this, and now it's just blown up in our faces." She let out a sob, but quickly regained her composure, interrupting Pedro.

"Let's start at the beginning. I know something happened, but I have no idea how much time passed. It's like waking up from a dream and not being able to remember anything. For me, time

was suspended. For you, seconds passed that you experienced without any interruption. Then there was that eight minutes with the image frozen on the monitors."

Pedro suggested that they write everything down and not worry about it until the next day. After a while, they collapsed on the bed, exhausted, distressed, and confused. A short time later, Pedro was sound asleep.

Shoko tossed and turned, rehashing it all in her troubled dreams. At the summit of Monte Tlapán, there was no observatory. Instead, she found herself facing the dazzling figure of a man dressed in the style of the ancient Aztecs. In a flash, this luminous sculptor had translated her features onto a block of stone. Her clothing, the remote control, and her windblown hair were all carved into the rock, but while the images were now etched there they nonetheless moved as if alive. Then, without words he explained something about the balance of the Earth and how it would be reestablished through a device that he would leave hidden for a period of centuries.

Unintentionally, she would accelerate the process, putting the entire project at risk. It would be necessary to turn part of the excess energy back on itself, contracting it until it became matter. This process would return her to the original point in time, and the same would be true of everything related to the moment of the accident. It was a way of reordering things without setting off a chain of events that would affect larger systems. Shoko thought she grasped how her own deep memory of time would also remain enchained to a time centuries before her own birth, through an event that would only take place in the future. But then this luminous being opened his hands wide, and she was thrown once again into her own world.

They jumped out of bed as the floor started to move and the furniture began to creak. It was an earthquake, but by the time they got outside onto the large patio it had subsided. Day was breaking, and a gentle breeze blew in the direction of Tlapán.

The Aztec Calendar

Around the year 1300, the region of Tlapán was an important center of the Aztec empire. Guarded there was the illustrated record recounting the story of the long journey through the darkness of those who had first arrived and established the original people. Not far from here was the mountain on which the god Quetzalcoatl had descended, and from which he had visited different regions of the Earth. It was also there that, for a time, he taught everything-that-is. But one morning, other gods, riding an enormous plumed serpent, came seeking him. Before departing he left behind a gift, the enormous flying ship in which he had arrived, but he hid it in a place known only to a wise few. The descendants of these learned ones would know what to do when the appropriate moment arrived, because he left instructions for them engraved on a stone disk. But if anyone made a mistake, the flying ship would fly away and return to its master. Thus, Quetzalcoatl and the other gods drew away from the mortals, flying toward the morning star.

A century later, Montezuma II found that this troublesome story was spreading throughout his kingdom. He traveled to Tlapán and summoned the wise ones so that they would reveal the secret of Quetzalcoatl to him. The emperor's learned subjects explained to him that the significance of the stone disk had been greatly exaggerated. In truth, it was a calendar so useful that it served equally well to predict the astronomical cycles and to determine the right time to plant and to harvest. With the emperor's blessing, Tlapán was designated as the favored location from which to observe the stars and the fates. In any case, with the arrival of the white man the region was abandoned.

But these climatic and geographical truths, long distorted in legend, were reestablished centuries later when one of the worldwide network of radio telescopes was constructed on a high point in the region known as Monte Tlapán. Otherwise, the region was noteworthy only for its history, in particular the archeological dig located near the observatory. The staff from both sites would often cross paths in the sleepy little town, where they would trade stories of distant stars and fabulous kingdoms. It was not surprising, then, that the head of the archeological team should meet a Japanese expatriate at the site. After all, she was working only a short distance away and was curious about the history of the area.

Time and Rock

Leaving the house, they headed toward the foothills. But first they stopped at the dig. It was early and even the work crews had not yet arrived. There was a hint of alarm in the voices of the security guards who came out to meet them.

“Don Pedrito, there was a big quake last night, and then a wind that nearly sent us flying. We wanted to go into the compound, but we were afraid something would fall on us.”

“Don’t worry, Juan. We’ll go check it out.”

To one side, the stepped faces of the pyramid rose to a truncated apex. They began climbing the pyramid, finally reaching the terrace and the door that guarded the entrance. Pedro extended the antenna on the remote. When he pushed the button, the motor responded, and the heavy metal gate slowly opened. He gave Shoko a gentle pat on the back, “Good job!”

Entering the site, Pedro unlocked a shed and turned on the lights. It was filled with sawhorses, work tables, chests, and shelves covered with artifacts. In a dimly lit corner, a stone tablet revealed the true dimensions of *The Huntress*. The visitors stood enthralled for a moment as they contemplated the figure. In a soft voice Shoko asked about the place where it had been found. Pedro told her how the stone had been uncovered when excavation began on Monte Tlapán to supply building material for the observatory’s foundation. Later on, the figure had been brought down to the main dig site, and finally moved to its present location.

A new earthquake drowned out Pedro’s voice. The noise of ceramic objects clattering against each other, the cracking of stone walls, and the banging of the metal door accompanied the swaying of the lights that hung from long cables. At that moment they stood paralyzed, unable to flee, watching as the image of *The Huntress* appeared to move, almost stretching, as a soft phosphorescent glow bathed the tablet. It seemed to them that the relief of the carving had lost some of its flawless detail, as if it were suddenly showing the effects of the passage of time. Shoko felt that something was beginning to awaken deep in her memory.

Meanwhile, the crew of workers had arrived with their usual commotion. A short time later, at the base of the pyramid, Pedro gave instructions for measures to reinforce the site, in case of further earthquakes.

Pedro and Shoko left the dig and set off for the mountain. On the way, it was apparent that the wind was picking up and starting to blow toward Tlapán from every direction. Before long, they arrived at the observatory. Shoko rushed in, while Pedro waited patiently in the car. Finally, she came out again. Leaning back against the seat, Shoko sighed and began to talk about how things were getting more and more messed up, how after every little tremor the circuits would overload—and now the wind, which had been blowing nonstop since last night, had created a cloud of dust in the air that was interfering with signal reception by the radio telescope. She had changed two voltage regulators herself and needed to go back to town to order replacements.

Not wanting to go by helicopter, she would take her car or one of the observatory's vans. They kissed, promising to meet that evening back at the house.

The Sierra Madre Is to Blame

"Report of the Investigating Committee Regarding the Incident Referred to as the Case of 'Echo Retransmission.' Field team directed by Dr. M. Pri and Prof. A. Gort.

"At 9:12 P.M. on March 15, 1990, the observatory at Monte Tlapán ceased retransmission of radio astronomical signals. A video signal transmitted from the affected observatory was detected on the network, which at that time included stations in Costa Rica, Sydney, Xining, and Osaka. For a period of eight minutes the image of a human figure was observed in place of the usual non-terrestrial signals. In the initial investigation, the technicians reported that the automatic tracking system had accidentally focused on NGC-132, receiving signals from this radio source, some 352 light years away. Dr. Shoko Satiru stated that the seventeen staff members under her supervision concurred that there had been a brownout lasting eight minutes, after which system function was restored. Under these conditions, the Monte Tlapán transmitter should simply have stopped feeding data to the network. However, the transmission of a video image from that point forces us to consider the possibility that an echo from a commercial television transmitter may have interfered with Tlapán, with this television signal overriding the non-terrestrial source. Phenomena of this type have been reported previously and may be attributed to television signals bouncing off the Sierra Madre del Sur.

"With nothing further to report, we send our regards,

"M. Pri and A. Gort
"Mexico City, March 20, 1990"

Five days had passed since the event at the observatory. Earth tremors were occurring with greater frequency and intensity. At first the seismologists from Mexico City also blamed the Sierra Madre. There was a known fault where tectonic plates met that from time to time produced sizable earthquakes. But then things changed.

A large area around Tlapán was covered with seismographs and other devices. Curious onlookers were arriving from all over, and the army had cordoned off the area to prevent them from getting too close to the danger zone. By now the scientists felt that they were registering underground volcanic activity of some kind, and they were sure that if the situation continued it would end in some kind of eruption. The graphs of the instruments were following a curve that was growing nearly exponentially. At first the tremors occurred at twelve-hour intervals, then every eight hours, and so on. The observatory and the dig site were evacuated. Someone with binoculars looking around from a safe distance would not have discovered much—only a few stealthy television reporters foolishly risking their lives by venturing into the restricted area.

In the late afternoon, Shoko and Pedro arrived at the gate that led up to the observatory. They showed their credentials, and after being given the runaround were finally allowed through. They were still several kilometers from Tlapán when they were forced to pull off the road, stopping in a dry riverbed to seek shelter from the wind, which at times reached hurricane force.

Return to the Heavens

Toward midnight the wind and tremors ceased. Pedro tried to start the car, but the engine wouldn't turn over. The warm, beautiful night enticed them into walking back up to the road. The moon and the stars gave enough light for them to see without stumbling. Suddenly, they stopped. The high-tension wires that carried electricity to the area began to buzz loudly, giving off a bluish glow along their entire length. Ahead they could see Monte Tlapán bathed in light. Had they been far to the north, they would have sworn this was the aurora borealis, dancing in ever-changing colors, descending to earth.

They sat down on some rocks to watch the spectacle. Soon they noticed that the lights in town were flickering to the rhythm of the resplendent light show taking place on Tlapán. Finally, as the lights on the mountain grew even brighter, the town was left in total darkness.

They tried to organize their confused thoughts. Somehow the remote control for the gate had produced a harmonic effect that had activated the motors of the radio telescope. Sweeping past other signals, the telescope had stopped exactly on NGC-132, some 352 light years away, yet somehow captured images produced 704 years earlier at this very spot. These two points had entered into a resonance that lasted until the rotation of the Earth shifted the radio telescope's field of reception eight minutes later. But for this to happen, it would have been necessary to somehow have been present on the mountain 704 years earlier. It was all too unbelievable. But it might have been possible if, for example, the remote had activated an enormous amplifier, either in the observatory or nearby. If this were the case, the microvoltages of a person's cerebral activity at sixteen cycles per second might have been amplified, producing the stroboscopic effects that were observed. That is to say, the amplifier might have had the ability to project images captured from a nearby nervous system, say, of someone thinking of the photograph of *The Huntress*. Of course, that doesn't explain how these amplified images could have interfered with the radio telescope. Such an amplifier may also have caused a phenomenon of ionic absorption, displacing layers of air and producing the unusual gusts of wind.

As for the rest, the electrical disturbance that led to this absorption could have broken down the ohmic resistance between the tectonic plates, increasing their conductivity and allowing them to move; thus the earth tremors. All right, but this amplifier, which is at the heart of the explanation, is something that couldn't even exist. Similarly, the leap into the past was something completely impossible, unthinkable as a hypothesis. And so all of this was filled with contradictions from start to finish.

The glow from Tlapán increased as dawn approached. As Venus rose above the horizon, they could hear a roar that grew louder until it was almost unbearable. The high-tension towers began swaying, and many were torn right off their bases. Pedro and Shoko clutched one another tightly on the ground as they felt the beginnings of another powerful earthquake. Lightning bolts struck Tlapán with increasing intensity, until suddenly, as if it had been dynamited, the top of the mountain was blown completely off—the observatory was gone, and a short time later the mountain cracked open like an egg. Enormous pieces fell all around, and then there was silence.

A huge metallic form began rising slowly from what had been Monte Tlapán. Glowing in flames of changing color, it rose higher and higher until it appeared to be an enormous disk. It began moving toward the terrified observers. For a time, the ship hovered over them, and they could clearly see the symbol of Quetzalcoatl on its side. Finally it took off abruptly in the

direction of the morning star. At that moment Shoko's deep memory was liberated, and she knew that *The Huntress* had been forever freed from her stone prison.

Day of the Winged Lion

To Danny

Every kind of virtual reality hardware and software was selling well. No doubt these technologies were of great benefit to students of history and the natural sciences. There was also growing demand from that large sector of the public who, for their daily dose of entertainment, looked forward to leisurely walks among the Egyptian pyramids or the flora and fauna of the Amazon jungle. One could go on these trips alone or with others, and with or without a guide. However, many preferred that old standby—a menu of options that could be called up at the touch of a finger. Catalogs overflowed with possibilities that ranged from adaptations of old movies in which the user became the protagonist, to video games that allowed one to engage in combat in outer space, or affairs with the icons of the age made flesh. It was like living in a comic book or a science fiction adventure, but one filled with stimuli realistic enough to cause heart attacks in some thrill-seekers, who were so unwise as to use programs that were not recommended by the Committee for the Defense of the Weak Nervous System. Even personal computers were capable of running the most extraordinary software and, taking advantage of this situation, hackers began to introduce virtual viruses capable of producing everything from dissociation to psychosomatic illnesses. It was so easy to put on a helmet and gloves, turn on the computer, and select a program—even children had time especially set aside for them to travel into these realms.

A Subcommittee of the Committee for the Defense of the Weak Nervous System

As a precautionary measure, everyone in the subcommittee used a *nom de guerre*. Alpa set the agenda and supervised the Project, coordinating the activities of a team that had been put together over several years. She had been recruited because of the unusual method she had developed to train topflight Alpine skiers. While other teachers stressed sustained physical training, her method brought students together in a large room where images of events such as the giant slalom or the ski jump were projected over and over again. Once the scenery and the course for that event had been presented, the room would go totally dark, and participants were asked to imagine repeatedly every twist and turn of the run. Sometimes soft music would accompany these practice sessions, and later while the subjects slept the same music would waft through their quarters. As a result, there was more than one athlete who, though they had never set foot on a particular course before the competition, nonetheless performed as if they were skiing on their own home slopes.

Tenetor III had first learned of Alpa from a video on winter sports. Intrigued, he went to Sils Maria to look her up.

The very last member recruited was Seguidor, who was placed in charge of the advanced technology group. Along with Huron and Faro, he formed part of a group that could only have been held together by the special talent of the ineffable Jalina, with her gift for creating cohesive human environments. Alpa would set the goals and timetables, and, as communications specialist, Tenetor III would serve as the nerve center for their activities. The team itself was set

up as a subcommittee of the Committee for the Defense of the Weak Nervous System, and since Tenetor was the director of that institution, the group managed to function without too many difficulties.

The Project

Toward the end of the twentieth century, a group of scientists led by an obscure official at UNESCO had come to the conclusion that within a few decades some eighty-five percent of the world's population would be functionally illiterate. They also calculated that primary literacy would soon be eliminated as great masses of people moved from books, magazines, and newspapers to TV, videos, computers, and holographic projections. In itself this was nothing to be alarmed about, since information already flowed in greater quantities than in any previous period, and that flow was only going to increase. But they foresaw that the increase in *unstructured information* would have an impact not only on isolated individuals, it would end up affecting the framework of the entire social system. From a specialist's point of view these studies were interesting, utilizing as they did an analytical approach that followed a computer-generated scheme. However, in the end it was the *inability to establish coherent overall relationships* that would have the greatest impact.

By this time, a mistrust of anything but the analytical approach had grown to the point that any conversation about generalities lasting longer than three minutes was pejoratively labeled "ideological." In fact, people found any attempt at all to reach general truths quite distressing, and were able to maintain their attention only on topics that were very specific—a habit that was reinforced in both the workplace and educational institutions. Historians studied the metallurgy of Etrurian rings in attempting to explain how that society functioned. Anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers were reduced to such activities as computing grammatical analyses.

The focus on externalities and formalism in both thinking and feeling reached such a pitch that the only way citizens could find to be different or original was to vary some small detail of their dress or appearance. While medicine and sports continued to progress, everything else became secondary—as secondary as the fate of those peoples and communities that declined because they did not adapt to the new world order; as secondary as the lives of the new generations bled dry in ruthless competition to achieve short-term goals. On top of everything, it had been decades since the capacity to formulate general scientific theories had been rendered sterile. Everything had been reduced to applying technologies that were, in any case, racing off in all directions.

It was in this context that the UNESCO official presented the report and appealed for help in studying this social pathology and its near-term tendencies. A sizeable budget was immediately allocated for research, perhaps because the decision-makers believed the effort would help to improve efficiency. Thanks to this misunderstanding, work on the project continued for a number of years. In this way, the Committee was constituted as an authorized para-cultural organization charged with disseminating information and making recommendations to those countries that supported UNESCO through the United Nations.

Even decades after UNESCO had disappeared, the Committee continued to function, although its source of support was unclear. In any event, it was seen as an institution that served the public good and that drew on the support of individuals of good will from all over the world. The Committee produced annual reports that no one took seriously, but more than this it

continued to direct its research efforts toward developing a model of human behavior that would be free from the kinds of problems that were clearly on the rise. By then the Committee had come to believe that the combination of a particular type of unstructured information and a certain form of education was blocking certain areas of the brain, causing the initial symptoms of a mental epidemic that would eventually become uncontrollable. The “Project,” as it was called by its directors, was doing research on developing an “antidote” that would be capable of unblocking this frozen mental activity. But at the time it was not even clear to them whether what was needed was to develop procedures for physiological training, or whether it was a matter of synthesizing beneficial chemical substances, or whether the goal would be better achieved by channeling their resources into designing some kind of electronic device. What was certain was that these millions of mentally blocked beings were causing growing disruption in our collective life. These individuals, who were increasingly lost in narrow specialization and less and less able to reason about their own lives, would eventually wind up displacing the rest of society, which, lacking any goals, would be left struggling with suicide, neurosis, and growing pessimism.

Before his death, that obscure official took the name Tenetor I, and he left the Project in the hands of his closest collaborators.

Cosmic Clay

When the surface of the planet began to cool, a precursor arrived and chose the model for what was intended as a self-sustaining process. The precursor’s greatest interest was in preparing a matrix of *n* progressively diverging possibilities, thus creating the conditions for life. With time, the yellowish wisps of the primitive atmosphere began to turn blue and its protective shield began functioning within acceptable limits.

Later, the visitor observed the behavior of various species. A few made the move to dry land and hesitantly began to adapt to these new conditions. Others retreated once again to the seas. The multitudes arising in these varied environments either succumbed or survived to continue their transformations unchecked. Everything that chance brought was respected, until finally there arose a creature of medium size, capable of being highly discerning, and able to transfer information and store memory outside of its own immediate circuitry.

This new monster had followed one of the evolutionary patterns suited to the blue planet: a pair of arms, a pair of eyes, and a brain divided into two hemispheres. Almost everything in this creature was symmetrical in a fundamental way, including its thoughts, feelings, and actions—which were, after all, encoded in its neurochemical system. Still, the expansion of its temporal horizon and the formation of layers of register in its internal space would require some time. As things stood, it was barely capable of deferring responses or recognizing the difference between perceptions, dreams, and hallucinations. Its attention span was erratic and, of course, it was unable to reflect upon its own actions since it was not quite able to grasp the nature of the objects with which it was interacting. It viewed its own actions in reference to the objects immediately at hand, and as long as it continued to see itself as a mere reflection of the external world, could not make way for its deeper intention—which was the only way to produce the necessary mutation of its own mind. The acts of capturing and fleeing had shaped its primary feelings, expressed as attraction and repulsion. Slowly, the clumsy, symmetrical bipolarity that marked this protospecies began to change. For the moment its behavior was all too predictable,

but there would come a moment when it would transform itself, making a leap toward indeterminacy and chance.

So it was that the visitor looked forward to a new birth in this species, in which he had recognized both fear in the face of death and the vertigo of destructive fury. He had witnessed how these beings trembled with hallucinations of love, how they anguished over their imagined future in the solitude of the empty Universe, and how they struggled to decipher the traces of their own beginnings in this world into which they had been thrown. At some point, this species formed of cosmic clay would set out along unforeseeable paths on the way to discovering its own origins.

Pure Virtual Space

On that particular day, Tenetor III would test the new material provided by Seguidor. He entered the anechoic chamber, observing the gleaming test seat in the center of the empty room. With his close-fitting clothes, his helmet, gloves, and boots, he felt like an old-time biker encased in aluminum. He lay down, ready to begin, and as he changed position the seat immediately adjusted itself to him, tilting back like an easy chair. At last he would experience this new phenomenon directly, without relying on the artifice of preprogrammed images. His body would provide the impulses and signals that would, without any mediation, populate an entire environment. If everything worked properly he would be able to view a translation of his mental world through the technology of virtual reality, and the Project would have found a way to realize its goals.

He lowered his visor and found himself in total darkness. Touching a button on the helmet, he logged onto the system. Gradually, the illuminated contours framing the inside of the visor began to appear. The screen was located some twenty centimeters in front of his eyes. Suddenly his body appeared, suspended in a spherical, mirrored room. The monitor responded with great precision as he tried directing his gaze in every direction. This did not seem particularly noteworthy, for he knew that his optic nerves were transmitting signals to the interface connected to the central processing unit. As he moved his eyes to the right, the images ran in the opposite direction until they occupied the center of his line of sight. Looking up, the projection moved down, and so on in every direction he tried. He looked at the tip of his right boot and, with only the slightest effort, adjusted the focus to see finer detail, zooming in on the object until it filled the entire screen. Then, disengaging, he zoomed out until he appeared to be only a tiny point, glittering in the center of the mirrored space. The optical program had the magnification and definition of the best electron microscopes and the power of the largest telescopes. The latter, however, had previously been useless, because until now it had not been possible to view the astronomical world from within confines as small as the helmet's projection area.

Today would mark an important advance if the probes Seguidor had placed on the internal surface of the sensor clothing worked properly. Information corresponding to the nerve signals that were activating various parts of his body should appear on the screen. He touched the second button on the helmet, and an alphanumeric column immediately lit up and began to scroll down the left side of the visor, as a small display on the right showed his right hand touching the helmet. As he lowered his arm slowly, the information displayed in the column began to change, while the small display on the right showed the outline of his arm as it was being lowered. He swallowed, and fresh data was again listed in the column. The display

showed the inside of his mouth, and then his esophagus moving gently. As a test, he thought of Jalina, and the small display showed his heart beating at an abnormally fast rate. Then it showed his lungs expanding slightly and his penis turning a light reddish color. At the same time, the scrolling column displayed information on a number of other phenomena within his body: blood pressure, temperature, acidity and alkalinity, blood electrolyte concentration, and the flow of signals in his nervous system.

Focusing his gaze straight ahead, once more he saw his image appear on the screen, suspended in the spherical space. It was obvious that he was looking at himself from outside, and from this external point of view the image looked somewhat deformed, as if seen in a concave mirror. He began breathing slowly and deeply. Soon, the probes began to function. A moment later he slowed the rhythm of his breathing to something like that of deep sleep and watched as his image gradually approached, until it seemed to be just outside the screen. It moved closer and closer to his eyes, until finally it was touching them and, in transparent fusion, disappeared. Then everything went black, as if someone had pulled the system's plug. Reaching out an arm seemed to tear open the blackness, allowing a distant light to penetrate. In these images, he drew near the light, while the column and small display at the edges of his visor showed the physical changes corresponding to his mental process. With efforts of this kind he felt he was making headway through the twists and turns of virtual reality.

In the dim light that suffused the cave, the feeling of strangeness began to dissipate. He recognized the vivid outlines of the caves tunneled into the hills, the humid odors awakening memories of pleasant emotions, the strength of the rock, and the distance and texture of various objects. In the small display he saw a slow walking motion and a succession of various parts of his body as each was put in motion. A hooded figure appeared before him, but soon he noticed in the display that this image was the translation of tiny movements of his tongue muscle inside the cavity of his mouth. Through half-closed eyes he saw lights all around, but realized that these were simply the amplified signals of the nerves stimulating the muscles of his eyelids. The sensor clothing was doing a good job of detecting the infinitesimal body movements that corresponded to his mental images, creating a situation that was truly hallucinatory.

The hooded figure offered him a vessel. Taking it in his hands, he drank the contents, which went down his throat with the same reality as a drink of cool water in a parched desert. He felt ready to cross the cavern and make his way to external space.

The Committee Is Organized

Following the death of Tenetor I, there was a serious crisis in the Committee. All of its members were in agreement that human behavior was in many respects suffering a progressive deterioration, and they also recognized that with each passing day the explosion of technology offered a host of new possibilities. But when it came to interpreting these events, there were two positions that were in conflict. On the one hand, the "scientificists" claimed that recurrent social behavior modified the work of certain areas of the human brain, generating a particular sensibility and way of perceiving phenomena. According to this view, the management of major companies and their public relations professionals simply guided the social process following the behavioral codes in which they themselves had been formed. In a similar vicious circle, pedagogues developed systems of teaching and education that merely reinforced their own personal beliefs. The "scientificists" claimed that it would be impossible to make any change in the direction of this mechanical process that they called the "System." They held fast to the old

Einsteinian dictum that said: *For any system in uniform motion, no phenomenon within that system can give evidence of that system's movement.* They always used the old master's example of the traveler on a train going 120 kilometers per hour: If the traveler jumped, he would not come down in a different car of the train. In any inertial system, whether prehistoric train or space vehicle, the jump would have essentially no effect on that system. One would have to take control of the train or spaceship in order to change the direction of that moving body.

To this the "historicists" responded by saying that those who took control of the train would change course according to the ground rules in which they had been formed. They asked: *"What difference is there between the leaders of the past and those of the present if all behave in accordance with the landscapes in which they were formed, in accordance with the areas of their brains that are most active? There would be no difference beyond the particular interests of those concerned with driving the train."* As a result, the "historicists" put their faith in larger processes, finding inspiration in those historical moments in which living beings, for reasons of survival, had modified their habits and been able to change. But they also recognized that many species had disappeared due to their inability to adapt.

It was a debate that was endless. And it was at this time that Tenetor II came to head the Committee, elected because he held a position equidistant between the two contending positions.

Tenetor II oriented the Project toward research on outstanding human achievements, a topic on which the "scientificists" and "historicists" could agree. The result was a vast compilation of scientific and artistic knowledge that had improved the human process, expanding the possibilities for overcoming pain and suffering. As head of the Committee, he played an important role in selecting the personnel who would be training new recruits in the ideas of the Project. He personally took on the arduous task of seeking out individuals capable of breaking out of the mold and the old beliefs imposed by the System and orienting their lives in favor of values and conduct that were highly atypical when judged by the unquestioned belief in efficiency then in vogue. When that singular group was finally assembled, he named it the "Committee for the Defense of the Weak Nervous System," defining its mission as an institution dedicated to the rescue and protection of individuals who were intellectually inept at adapting to the System. In addition, he divided the Committee into specialized subcommittees, asking one of them to produce educational material suitable for the "unadapted" from every region of the planet. At the same time, he worked to develop security software and anti-virus programs for those software companies who were battling the information pirates.

Tenetor II settled in Mesopotamia, and from there carried out his field expeditions. He remained in continuous contact with Committee headquarters, but one fine day, as he was traveling between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, his signals ceased. A few hours later, a rescue team comprised of Faro and Huron arrived at the spot. They found only his vehicle, his survey equipment, and an information crystal. The explorer was never heard from again.

The Living Characters

Tenetor III paused at the mouth of the cave, preparing to step into the external space. "But what external space?" he asked himself. Were he to remove his helmet he would find himself seated in the anechoic chamber. Troubled by this question, he remembered the disappearance of Tenetor II and the incoherent data recovered from the crystal when it was activated: a

monotonous holograph in which the explorer appeared, singing a long, plaintive song. That was all.

But he also remembered the voice of his teacher. He remembered the poetry that in times past had flowed from his instructor like a sea breeze. He heard the music of strings and the sound of synthesizers. He saw phosphorescent canvases and paintings growing on the flexible manganese walls. Once again his skin brushed against the sensitive sculptures. From his teacher he had received an understanding of that art which touches the deepest reaches of being, as deep as Jalina's black eyes, as deep as that mysterious tunnel. He took a deep breath and started toward the exit to the cave.

It was a beautiful afternoon, resplendent with color. The low sun outlined the mountains in red, and the two rivers in the distance followed their serpentine paths of silver and gold. Then Tenetor III was witnessing the scene that the holograph had partially shown.

There sat his predecessor, singing toward Mesopotamia:

Oh, Father, call up the sacred letters from the depths.
Bring near that fount in which I could always see
The spreading branches of the future!

As the song multiplied in distant echoes, there appeared in the sky a tiny point, approaching rapidly. Tenetor adjusted his zoom to the appropriate distance, and could clearly see the wings and head of an eagle, the body and tail of a lion, the flight of a majestic ship—living metal, poetry and myth in motion, reflecting the rays of the setting sun. The song continued as the winged figure displayed its profile, extending its powerful lion's paws. Then there was silence, and the celestial griffin opened its enormous ivory beak, answering with a shriek that echoed throughout the valley, awakening the power of the serpent beneath the earth. Large boulders broke loose, raising clouds of dust and sand with their fall. But everything was suddenly calm as the animal gently descended. Before long a rider leaped down before the man, who was thankful for the long-awaited presence of his father.

From a saddlebag on the griffin, the rider brought out a huge tome, as old as the world. Later, seated on the multi-colored rocks, father and son breathed in the air of the late afternoon. Having passed a long time in contemplation, they were thus prepared, and opened the ancient volume. On each page the cosmos was made visible. In a single letter they saw the movement of spiral galaxies, of open and globular clusters. In the dance of characters on the ancient parchment they could read the motions of the cosmos.

In time, the two men (if indeed they were men) rose to their feet. The elder, with flowing, rumpled, wind-blown clothing, smiled as no one else in this world could ever have smiled. In his heart, Tenetor III heard the following words: *"A new species will open to the Universe. Our visit has come to an end!"* That was all.

Nothing more.

Tenetor watched as the serpentine gold and silver rivers that lay before his eyes were transformed into the arteries and veins running through his body. His lungs appeared on the small display in his visor, bearing witness to his heavy breathing. From this he began to understand the source of the griffin's beating wings, and he knew that in some region of his memory he could find the mythic images he had seen take shape with such striking reality.

As he decided to return to the cave, he observed the stream of alphanumeric information scrolling down the edge of his visor. Immediately, the small display showed the infinitesimal movements his images were inducing in his legs, and with this he entered the cavern. "I know

what I'm doing," he thought. "I know what I'm doing!" But these words, which he spoke to himself, resounded outside of him, reaching his ears from the outside. As he looked at the rock wall, he heard words referring to it. He was breaking through the barrier of naming, in which all the senses mix. Perhaps for this reason he remembered the poem his teacher used to recite:

> "*A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu:*
> *voyelles Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes*."[1]

Then he saw a rock whose edges opened, blossoming like colored flowers. And in that kaleidoscope of hues he realized that he was breaking through the barrier of vision. He moved beyond each of his senses, as when profound art touches the very limits of the space of existence.

Pulling off his helmet, he found himself in the anechoic chamber, but he was not alone. For some reason, the entire subcommittee was present. As Jalina kissed him softly he could sense the group's impatience.

"I'm not saying a word!" were Tenetor's shocking first words. But then he added that he would document everything in a report that should not be shown to the other members of the group until everyone had had their turn. Thus it was decided that all the members should make their own journeys into pure virtual space. In the end, this would allow them to process data that would be free of any influence from the others. Only then would it be appropriate to begin the discussion, because if it turned out that everyone in fact recognized the same landscape in pure virtual space, this would mean that the Project could be realized.

But even then how could it possibly extend its reach throughout the world? Perhaps the answer was the same as for any new technology. Besides, there were distribution channels that already existed thanks to this network of exceptional people who were so much more than the empty husks that much of humanity had been reduced to. He knew now that he did indeed exist, that all the others existed, and that this was the most important point on a long list of priorities.

No Support for Planetary Colonies!

"Good morning, Mrs. Walker."

"Good morning, Mr. Ho."

"I imagine you've seen this morning's report. And if you have, then I suppose you noticed in checking the bulletins that there has been a decision to intervene in the question of planetary colonies."

"That's right, Mr. Ho. You're absolutely right. No one on Earth is going to support an effort of that kind until there's an end to the monstrous situation where even a single human being lives below the standard of living that the rest of us enjoy.

"I'm glad to hear that, Mrs. Walker. Very glad indeed! But tell me, exactly when did everything begin to change? When did we first realize that we exist and, therefore, that the others exist as well? Right now, I know that I exist. It sounds pretty silly, doesn't it, Mrs. Walker?"

[1] The opening lines of the poem by Rimbaud: "A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue; / Someday I'll tell your latent birth O vowels."

“It’s not silly at all. I exist because you exist, and vice versa. That’s the reality, and it’s everything else that’s silly. I think the guys from the—what’s it called?—‘The Deficient Intelligence’ or something like that?”

“The Committee for the Defense of the Weak Nervous System. No one remembers them. Which is why I’ve dedicated a poem to them.”

“Good. Very good. Well, they certainly managed to straighten things out. I don’t really know how they did it, but they did. If it wasn’t for them, we’d all have become ants or bees or trifinus melancolicus! There’s no way we could have known what was about to happen. At least not for a long time. And we might not have experienced what we’re experiencing right now. I’m only sorry that Clotilde and Damian and so many others didn’t make it to see the changes. They were really desperate, and the worst part was that they didn’t know why. But let’s look to the future.”

“That’s it—you’re right, of course. The entire social organization, if you can call it that, is collapsing. It’s come undone in such a short time. Amazing! But this crisis is definitely worth it. Some are afraid because they think they’re going to lose something. But what have they got to lose? We’ve already started to give shape to a new society. And as soon as we get our house in order, we’ll make another leap forward. That’s when we’ll see planetary colonies, galaxies, and immortality. I’m not worried about us falling into some new kind of idiocy in the future, because by then we’ll have grown. It seems that it’s in the most difficult moments that our species is able to get it together.”

“They started with those virtual reality programs. They designed them so that everyone wanted to play, and soon people were realizing that they weren’t cardboard cutouts themselves. They discovered that they existed. The kids were the ones who got things going, but it would have happened in any event, though maybe not as fast. People took things into their own hands. Did they ever! The end of history was spectacular—eighty-five percent of the people in the world either saw or dreamed the winged lion and heard the words of the visitors when they returned to their world. I saw it. What about you?”

“I dreamed it.”

“It’s the same. I know this is the first time we’ve talked, but could I ask you a big favor?”

“Of course, Mrs. Walker. We’re living in a new world, and it can still be hard for us to find ways to communicate openly with each other.”

“Would you read me your poems? I imagine they’re inefficient, arbitrary, and above all, comforting.”

“That’s right, Mrs. Walker. They’re inefficient and comforting. I’d be glad to read them to you any time. Have a marvelous day.”

Letters to My Friends

On Social and Personal Crisis in Today's World

First Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

For some time now I have been receiving correspondence from various countries requesting that I explain or elaborate on certain of the subjects addressed in my books. For the most part what they have sought are explanations about such concrete issues as violence, politics, the economy, the environment, as well as social and interpersonal relationships. As you can see, these concerns are many and varied, and it is clear that the answers will have to come from specialists in these fields, which of course I am not. Yet while trying as far as possible not to repeat what I have written elsewhere, hopefully I will be able to present a brief outline of the general situation in which we are now living, along with some of the principal trends looming on the horizon.

In other eras, a certain idea of “cultural malaise” has been used as the unifying thread in this type of description. Here, in contrast, I will focus on the rapid changes taking place in the economies of different countries, as well as in their customs, ideologies, and beliefs, in an attempt to trace the particular type of disorientation that today seems to be asphyxiating both individuals and entire peoples.

Before entering the subject at hand, I would like to remark on two points. The first has to do with the world that has disappeared—a subject that may seem to some to be treated with a certain nostalgia in this letter. I will say on this point that those of us who believe in human evolution are not in the least depressed by the changes we see. On the contrary, we would like to see events accelerate faster still as we try to adapt ourselves increasingly to these new times.

The second point concerns the style of this letter—a style some may interpret as completely lacking in nuance, presenting these themes as it does in such a “primitive” way—so unlike the formulations of those whom we criticize. Regarding the form of expression that these champions of the “New World Order” might prefer, I simply offer the following comment. When speaking of these people, passages from two very different literary works keep echoing in my mind—George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Each of these exceptional writers foresaw a future world in which, through means either violent or persuasive, the human being is finally overwhelmed and reduced to an automaton. But I believe that, influenced perhaps by an undercurrent of pessimism that I will not attempt to interpret here, both writers in their novels attributed rather too much intelligence to the “bad guys” and too much stupidity to the “good guys.”

Today’s “bad guys” are very greedy people who have many problems, but who are in any case wholly incompetent to orient historical processes, processes that clearly elude both their will and their capacity to plan. These people, who are not very studious, are served in turn by technicians who possess only fragmentary and woefully inadequate resources. So I will ask you not to take too seriously those few paragraphs in which I have amused myself by putting in their mouths words they have not actually spoken, although their intentions do indeed go in the direction indicated. I believe that these matters should be approached without the customary solemnity so characteristic of this dying age, and that instead they should be treated with the irreverent good humor one finds in letters exchanged between true friends.

1. The Present Situation

From the beginning of history, humanity has evolved through working to achieve a better life. Yet today, across wide regions of the planet, and in spite of the enormous advances achieved by humankind, what we see are power, economic might, and technology being used to murder, impoverish, and oppress people—destroying, moreover, the future of the generations to come and the overall equilibrium of life on this planet. While a tiny percentage of humanity now possesses great wealth, for the majority even their basic needs remain unmet. While in certain areas there may be sufficient jobs and adequate wages, in many other areas the situation is disastrous. And everywhere the most humble sectors of society undergo horrors each day simply to avoid starvation.

Today, and solely by the fact of having been born into a social environment, every human being should have access to an adequate level of nutrition, health care, housing, education, clothing, and services. And when they reach an advanced age, all people need to have a secure future for the remaining years of their lives. People have every right to desire these things for themselves, and they have every right to want their children to have a better life. But today, for thousands of millions of people, even these basic aspirations remain unfulfilled.

2. The Alternative of a Better World

Numerous economic experiments have been tried, with mixed results, in attempts to moderate the aforementioned problems. Today's trend is to apply a system in which we are told that hypothetical "market laws" will automatically regulate social progress, avoiding in this way the economic disasters of the previous experiments in controlled economies. According to this scheme, wars, violence, oppression, inequality, poverty, and ignorance will all fade away without any untoward consequences. Countries will integrate into regional markets, until finally we arrive at a global society that is without barriers of any kind. In this way, we are assured, just as the standard of living for the poorer sectors of developed regions will rise, so too will the less advanced areas receive the benefits of this progress.

The majority of people will adapt to this new arrangement, which competent technicians and business people will set in motion. If, however, something should fail to work out, it will certainly not be because of any problem with these infallible "natural economic laws," but only because of the shortcomings of those particular specialists—who, as happens in business, will simply be replaced as often as necessary. At the same time, in this "free" society the public will choose democratically among different options, always provided, of course, that their choices lie within this same system.

3. Social Evolution

Given the present circumstances, it is perhaps worthwhile to briefly reflect on this alternative, which is currently touted as the way to achieve a better world. Indeed, a great many economic experiments have been tried, yielding rather inconsistent results. Yet notwithstanding this, we are nonetheless being told that this latest experiment holds the only solution to our fundamental problems. There are, however, certain aspects of this new proposal that some of us fail to grasp.

First, there is the question of economic laws. It could appear plausible that, as in nature, there are certain mechanisms that through their free interplay will automatically regulate social

evolution. However, we find great difficulty in accepting the argument that any human process, and certainly the economic process, belongs to the same order as natural phenomena. On the contrary, we believe that human activities are non-natural, that they are instead intentional, social, and historical. These particularly human phenomena do not exist in nature in general or in other animal species. Then, since economic processes reflect human intentions and interests, in light of events we see nothing to support the belief that those with control over the well-being of humanity are concerned with overcoming the difficulties of others less privileged than themselves.

Second, the assertion that societies have progressed notwithstanding the vast economic differences that have always separated the few “haves” from the majority of “have-nots” seems quite unsatisfactory. History demonstrates that peoples have advanced when they have demanded their rights from the established powers, and that social progress has clearly not been the result of some automatic “trickle down” of the wealth accumulated by one sector of society.

Third, it seems rather excessive to hold up as models certain countries that by operating within this so-called free market economic system have achieved a high standard of living. These countries have, after all, undertaken wars of expansion against other countries. They have imposed colonial and neo-colonial systems. They have partitioned nations and entire regions. They have exacted tribute through methods based on violence and discrimination. Finally, they have taken advantage of cheap labor in weaker economies, while at the same time imposing unfavorable trade terms on them. Some will argue that these procedures are no more than what are known as “good business deals.” However, they cannot affirm this and then still claim that the economic development of these “advanced” countries has taken place independent of a special and unequal type of relationship with other countries.

Fourth, we frequently hear of the scientific and technical advances and the initiative that “free market” economies foster. But it is clear that scientific and technical progress began from the moment human beings invented clubs, levers, fire, and so forth, and that this progress has continued in a process of historical accumulation that has paid little heed to any particular economic form or set of market laws.

If, on the other hand, what they are trying to say is that the wealthy economies attract the largest part of the supply of talented people, that they have the resources to pay for equipment and research, and finally that they can provide more motivation in the form of greater compensation, then it should also be noted that this same phenomenon has occurred since ancient times, and is neither limited to nor the result of any one type of economy. Rather, it is simply that in this particular time and place—independent of the origin of such economic strength—an abundance of resources has accumulated.

Fifth, there remains the expedient of explaining the progress of “advanced” communities as the result of certain intangible natural “gifts”—special talents, civic virtues, hard work, organization, and the like. This is, however, no longer a rational argument, but instead a kind of devotional affirmation that, with some sleight of hand, obscures the social and historical realities that explain how those peoples were formed.

There are many of us, of course, who lack sufficient understanding to see how, given its historical background, the present market scheme will be able to survive even in the short run. But that forms part of another discussion—one that includes the question of whether this “free market economy” really exists at all, or whether in reality we are perhaps dealing with various forms of protectionism and indirect or disguised control, through which those in charge promptly

loosen the reins in those areas where they feel in control and tighten them in areas where they do not. If this is the case, then every new promise of progress will remain in practice limited solely to the explosive development and spread of science and technology, which is independent of any supposed automatism in economic laws.

4. Future Experiments

Today, as throughout history, whenever necessary the prevailing scheme will simply be replaced by another that supposedly “corrects” the defects of the previous model. But all the while wealth will continue to concentrate step by step in the hands of an increasingly powerful minority.

At the same time, it is clear that neither evolution nor the legitimate aspirations of the people will come to a stop. So it is that soon we will see the last of any naive assurances that the end of ideologies, confrontations, wars, economic crises, and social unrest is at hand. And since no point on Earth is unconnected to the rest, both local solutions as well as local conflicts now rapidly become global. One other thing is certain: That which has prevailed until now can no longer be maintained—neither the present schemes of domination nor the formulas for struggle against them.

5. Change and Relationships Among People

The regionalization of markets, like the demands for local and ethnic autonomy, underscore the disintegration of the nation state. The population explosion in poorer regions is stretching to the breaking point all attempts to control migration. The large extended rural family is fragmenting, displacing younger members toward the overcrowded cities. The urban industrial and post-industrial family has shrunk to the minimum, while at the same time the macro-cities must absorb an enormous influx of people who were formed in disparate cultural landscapes. Economic crises and the conversion of productive models are giving rise to renewed outbreaks of discrimination.

In the midst of all this, technological acceleration and mass production result in products that are obsolete almost before they reach consumers. This continuous turnover of objects has a correspondence in the instability and dislocation so visible in contemporary human relationships. By now, traditional “solidarity,” heir to what was once known as “fraternity,” has lost all meaning. Our companions at work, school, in sports—even old friends—have all taken on the character of competitors. Within couples, both partners struggle for control, calculating from the beginning of the relationship whether they have more to gain by staying together or separating.

Never before has the world been so closely interconnected, yet each day individuals experience a more anguishing lack of communication. Never before have urban centers been more populous, yet people speak of their “loneliness.” Never before have people needed human warmth so much as now, but any approach to another in a spirit of kindness and help elicits only suspicion. This is the predicament to which our hapless people been abandoned, each isolated individual being led to believe in the greatest unhappiness that he or she has something important to lose—an ethereal “something” that is coveted by all the rest of humanity! Under such circumstances, the following story may be related as if it reflected the most authentic reality.

6. A Tale for Aspiring Executives

"The society now being set in motion will at last bring us prosperity. But apart from the enormous objective benefits, there will also be a subjective liberation of humanity. Old-fashioned 'solidarity,' a notion proper to poverty, will no longer be necessary, for by now practically everyone agrees that you can solve almost any problem with money, or its equivalent. We will therefore dedicate all our efforts, thoughts, and dreams toward this end. With money, you can buy fine food, a nice home, and afford travel, entertainment, high tech playthings, and people to carry out your wishes. At last there will be efficient love, efficient art, and efficient psychologists to correct any personal problems that remain. And soon, even these problems will be resolved, thanks to new developments in neurochemistry and genetic engineering.

"In this society of abundance we will see suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, and all those other insecurities of the urban dweller simply fade away—as is sure to happen any day now, we are assured, in the economically developed countries. Discrimination will disappear as well, and communication among all people will increase. No longer will anyone have to bear the sting of needless rumination on the meaning of life, loneliness, sickness, old age, or death, because, with the appropriate courses and a little therapeutic help, it will be possible to block these sorts of reflections that until now have been such a hindrance to society's output and efficiency. Everyone will trust everyone else, because competition at work, school, and in personal dealings will result in mature relationships.

"The last of the ideologies will finally disappear and no longer be used to brainwash people. Of course, no one will interfere with protest or nonconformity about minor things, provided that people express themselves through the appropriate channels. As long as they do not confuse liberty with license, citizens may gather (in small numbers, for reasons of hygiene), and may even express themselves outdoors (provided that they do not disturb others with noise pollution or publicity materials that could deface the municipality, or whatever it will be called in the future).

"The most extraordinary thing of all, however, will come to pass when police surveillance is no longer necessary, because every citizen will have resolved to protect others from the lies that could be inculcated by some dangerous ideological terrorist. On encountering suspicious activity, these guardians of the public welfare will rush to the news media, where they will find a warm welcome, and a warning will quickly be issued to the public. But the activities of these responsible citizens will not end there, for they will write brilliant studies, which will be published immediately. They will organize forums in which experts and pundits who shape public opinion will elucidate these things for the unwary, who would otherwise be at the mercy of the dark forces of state economic control, authoritarianism, anti-democracy, and religious fanaticism.

"It will, moreover, hardly be necessary to pursue these troublemakers. With such an efficient information system in place, no one will dare go near these dangerous elements for fear of being contaminated.

"The more serious cases will be efficiently 'deprogrammed,' and will publicly express their gratitude at being reintegrated into society and for the benefits they have received upon recognizing the gifts of freedom.

"As a result of all this, those diligent guardians who have warned the public—if they were not sent specifically to carry out this vital mission—will be able to emerge from their anonymity and

sign autographs as they attain the social recognition that befits their high moral character and, as is only logical, receive a well-deserved reward.

“The Company will be one big happy family, assisting with all phases of education, relationships, and recreation. Thanks to robots and automation, physical labor will no longer be required, and working for the Company from one’s own home will provide genuine personal fulfillment.

“As a consequence, society will no longer have any need for organizations aside from the Company. Human beings, who have struggled for so long to achieve well-being, will at last reach the heavens—leaping from planet to planet they will discover true happiness. And that is where we will find our young citizen: well-established, competitive, charming, acquisitive, triumphant, and pragmatic—above all pragmatic—an executive in the Company!”

7. Human Change

The world is changing at a dizzying pace, and people can no longer hold on to much of what they believed unquestioningly until now. The acceleration of events is generating instability and disorientation in every society, rich and poor alike. In this situation of change, both traditional leaders and their “formers of public opinion,” as well as old political and social activists, no longer serve as points of reference for people.

Yet a new sensibility is being born that corresponds to these changing times. It is a sensibility that grasps the world as a whole—an awareness that the problems people experience in one place involve other people, even if they are far away. Increasing communication, trade, and the rapid movement of entire human groups from one place on the planet to another all attest to this growing process of globalization.

As the global character of more and more problems comes to be understood, new criteria for action arise. There is an awareness that the work of those who desire a better world will be effective only if they make their efforts grow outward from the environment where they already have some influence. In sharp contrast to other times, so full of empty phrases meant only to garner external recognition, today people are beginning to find value in humble and deeply felt work, work done not to enhance one’s self-image, but rather to change oneself and bring about change in one’s immediate environment of family, work, and friendship.

Those who truly care for people do not disdain this work done without fanfare, this work that proves so incomprehensible to those opportunists who were formed in an earlier landscape of leaders and masses—a landscape in which they learned well how to use others to catapult themselves to society’s heights.

When a person comes to the realization that schizophrenic individualism is a dead end, when they openly communicate what they are thinking and what they are doing to everyone they know without the ridiculous fear of not being understood, when they approach others not as some anonymous mass but with a real interest in each person, when they encourage teamwork in both the interchange of ideas and the realization of common projects, when they clearly demonstrate the need to spread this task of rebuilding the social fabric that others have destroyed, when they feel that even the most “unimportant” person is of greater human quality than some heartless individual whom circumstance has elevated to what is, for now, the pinnacle of success—when all this happens it is because within this person destiny has once again begun to speak, the destiny that has moved entire peoples along their best evolutionary

path, the destiny that has been so many times distorted and so many times forgotten, but is always re-encountered in the twists and turns of history.

Today we can glimpse not only a new sensibility and a new mode of action but also a new moral attitude and a new tactical approach to facing life. If I were pressed to be more specific I would simply reply, though it has been said time and again over the last three millennia, that today people are experiencing anew the need for and the true morality of treating others as they want to be treated. I could add to this, almost as general laws of conduct, that today people are aspiring to:

1. A certain *proportion*, in which one tries to give order to the most important things in one's life, dealing with them as a whole and not allowing some aspects to move ahead while others fall too far behind.
2. A certain *growing adaptation*, in which one acts in favor of evolution rather than momentary concerns, turning away from the various forms of human involution.
3. A certain *well-timed action*, in which one retreats when facing a great force (not every little obstacle) and advances when that force weakens.
4. A certain *coherence*, in which one accumulates those actions that bring one a feeling of unity, of being in agreement with oneself, and reject those actions that generate contradiction, that are registered within oneself as disagreements among what one thinks, feels, and does.

I do not feel it is necessary to elaborate on why I say that people are feeling anew "the need for and the true morality of treating others as they want to be treated," although some may object that this is not in fact how people act today. Nor do I believe it necessary to give lengthy explanations about what I understand by "evolution" or by "growing adaptation" as opposed to adaptation based on permanence. Concerning the parameters for knowing when to retreat or advance before a great or weakening force, people will certainly need to be able to recognize precise indicators beyond those mentioned here. Finally, it is obviously not easy to implement the proposal of accumulating unifying actions or, from the opposite point of view, rejecting contradictions, when dealing with the contradictory situations that touch our lives.

All of these considerations may be true, but if you review this letter you will see that these things have been discussed within the context of a new type of conduct to which people are today beginning to aspire—a type of behavior quite different from that to which people aspired in other times.

In this letter I have tried to note those special characteristics we see beginning to take shape that embody this new sensibility, this new type of personal conduct, and this new form of interpersonal action—all of which, it seems to me, go beyond a simple critique of today's situation. And while we know that criticism is always necessary, how much more necessary is it to do things in a new way—a way that is different from that which we criticize!

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

February 21, 1991

Second Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

In the previous letter I focused on the situation in which we now live and on certain tendencies visible in contemporary events. I also used the opportunity to discuss various proposals that defenders of market economics proclaim as if these were the inescapable preconditions for all social progress. I made note of the continuing decline in solidarity and the crisis of references now taking place. Finally, I outlined some positive characteristics that are beginning to appear in what I called a new sensibility, a new moral attitude, and a new tactical approach to facing life.

Some of my correspondents have expressed their disapproval of the tone of that letter, feeling it touched on subjects that are too grave to allow such irony. But let's not be so melodramatic—the system of proofs presented to justify the ideology of neoliberalism, social market economics, and the New World Order is so riddled with inconsistencies that this is hardly something to get worked up about.

I would like to point out that while the foundations of that ideology have long been dead, soon that entire edifice of ideas will be overtaken by a crisis so evident that even those who confuse meaning with expression, content with form, and process with circumstance will finally perceive it. Just as the ideologies of fascism and real socialism died long before these systems collapsed in practice, so too will the right-thinking people of today be caught by surprise as they recognize the collapse of the present system only after the fact.

Doesn't this all seem a bit ridiculous? It's like sitting through the same bad movie time after time. As we watch it over and over we begin to scrutinize tiny details—imperfections in the walls of the movie sets, the camera angles used, and whether the actors have shaved carefully—while the lady sitting beside us is overcome with emotion at what she is seeing for the first time, and what, for her, is reality itself.

On my own behalf, then, I might point out that I have not mocked the enormous tragedy that stems from the imposition of the present system, but instead the monstrous pretensions and grotesque end of this system—an ending that we have already witnessed before on too many previous occasions.

I have also received correspondence requesting more precise definitions of the attitudes recommended for facing the present process of social change. Before making any recommendations of this kind, however, I believe it would first be useful to try to understand the principal positions now held by various groups as well as by isolated individuals. Here I will limit myself to presenting the most popular positions, giving my views in those cases that seem to be of greatest interest.

1. Some Positions Regarding the Present Process of Change

Throughout the long ascent of humanity progress has occurred in a slow process of accumulation up to the present time, when the pace of economic and technological change has begun to outstrip the speed of change in social structures and human behavior. Many factors in

society are becoming more “out of phase” all the time, which is generating growing crises in today’s world.

This problem can be approached from various points of view. Some believe that the current disarticulation will automatically regulate itself, and they therefore recommend that we not attempt to direct this process, which would in any case be impossible to orient. This approach embodies an optimistic-mechanistic thesis. Still others believe we are heading toward an inevitable explosion—they hold a pessimistic-mechanistic thesis. Various moral currents are also making their appearance, attempting to stop change and, as far as possible, return to some original past where they assume that comfort is still to be found. They represent an anti-historical position. Meanwhile, all around us we hear a rising chorus of voices from contemporary cynics, stoics, and epicureans. The first deny that there is importance or meaning in any action at all. The second face events unflinchingly, even when everything goes badly. Those who adopt the third position seek personal benefit in every situation, thinking only of their own hypothetical well-being, which extends, at most, to their own children.

As in the final stages of past civilizations, many people today are opting for positions that pursue individual salvation, assuming that no task they might undertake with others could have any meaning or possibility of success—at most others have a useful role to play only insofar as they profit one within a speculation that is strictly personal. That is why aspiring business, cultural, and political leaders perfect and polish their public images, striving to seem credible so that people will believe they think of and act on behalf of others. This is, of course, a rather fruitless task, because by now everyone knows the tricks and no one believes in anyone else.

The old values—religious, patriotic, cultural, political, union, and so on—have all been subordinated to money in a landscape in which solidarity and, therefore, any collective opposition to the contemporary scheme of things has been eroded, even as the social fabric continues to unravel. Afterwards, another stage will follow in which this inordinate individualism will be outgrown—but that is a theme for later on.

With our landscape of formation weighing us down and our beliefs in crisis, we are not yet in any condition to admit that this new historical moment is approaching. Today, whether we wield some small measure of power or depend absolutely on the power of others, we all find ourselves touched by this individualism—a situation in which those who are better placed in the system have a clear advantage.

2. Individualism, Social Fragmentation, and the Concentration of Power in a Few

Individualism necessarily leads, however, to the struggle for the supremacy of the strongest and the pursuit of “success” at any price. This position began among a few who, relying on the acquiescence of the majority, respected certain rules of the game among themselves. In any event, this stage will soon exhaust itself and it will become “all against all,” because sooner or later the balance of power will tilt in favor of the strongest, and then the rest, either together or in alliances of various factions, will end up dismantling this fragile system.

In the meantime, however, as economies and technologies continue to develop, the powerful minorities continue to change along with them, perfecting their methods to such a degree that in some wealthy areas the majorities now effectively transfer their discontent to secondary aspects of the predicament in which they live. It appears that people generally no longer question the system as a whole but only certain urgent aspects when these strike close

to home. Because of this, there are some who suggest that despite the overall rise in the world's wealth and standard of living, the great masses of humanity who are left behind will simply be content to await a better life in some distant future.

All of this demonstrates an important shift in social behavior. And if this has occurred, activism for social change will continue to weaken as traditional political and social forces are left devoid of proposals. With the emptiness of individual isolation only partially filled by those structures that produce goods and leisure activities, the fragmentation of personal and collective life will continue to increase.

In this paradoxical world, all centralization and bureaucracy will be swept aside, breaking with the former structures of management and decision-making. Yet at the same time, this deregulation, decentralizing, and liberalizing of markets and procedures will leave the field wide open for the concentration of wealth and power to flourish on a scale unknown in any previous era, as international finance capital continues to flow into the hands of an ever more powerful banking system.

The political class will experience a similar paradox in that they will have to champion these new values, which in eroding the power of the State will simultaneously undermine their own leadership role. It is little wonder then that for some time they have been replacing words such as "government" with other words such as "administration," trying to lead "the public" (no longer "the people") to understand that a country is now a business.

In any event, and until the consolidation of a global imperial power, conflicts between regions could well occur as previously they occurred among countries. Whether such confrontations will be limited to the economic sphere or spill over into the arena of limited warfare, whether massive and incoherent unrest will as a consequence erupt, whether governments will fall pulling down countries and whole regions, will not in the least deter the process of concentration toward which this historical moment is heading. Local grievances, inter-ethnic fighting, migrations, refugees, sustained crises—none of these will alter the general picture of the increasing concentration of power.

And when the recession and unemployment become chronic among the populations of the wealthy countries, the stage of liquidating any remaining liberalism will have finished, ushering in the politics of control, coercion, and emergency in the finest imperial style—and who then will be able to speak of a free market economy, and what importance will it have to maintain positions based on an uncompromising individualism?

In this letter I will also respond to other concerns that my correspondents have raised concerning how to characterize the current crisis and its associated tendencies.

3. Characteristics of the Crisis

Let us turn now to the crisis of the nation state, the crisis of regionalization and globalization, and the crisis facing society, the group, and the individual.

In the context of the process of globalization, the flow of information is accelerating as the movement of both people and goods continues to increase. Technology and growing economic power are becoming concentrated in businesses that are ever more powerful. And this phenomenon of accelerating interchange is now encountering the limitations and slowed pace that are produced by traditional structures such as the nation state.

The result is that within each region national borders are becoming blurred. This means that countries are having to make their legislation more homogeneous, not only in matters of trade

regulations, duties and tariffs, and personal documentation, but also in adapting their systems of production. Changes in labor and social security laws cannot be far behind. Ongoing accords among these countries will show that a common legislature, judicial system, and executive will provide improved effectiveness and quicker response time in managing the region. Primitive national currencies will give way to some type of regional medium of exchange that will avoid the losses and delays of previous exchange operations.

The crisis of the nation state is a readily observable fact, not only in those countries that are joining to form regional markets but also in those whose battered economies have fallen significantly behind. Everywhere voices are being raised against entrenched bureaucracies, demanding the reform of established schemes. Old resentments as well as local, ethnic, and religious rivalries are resurfacing in regions where countries have recently been formed as a result of partitions, annexations, or artificial federations. And the traditional State is having to face this centrifugal tendency at just the time that growing economic difficulties are calling into question its effectiveness and legitimacy.

Phenomena of this type are growing in the areas of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the former Soviet Union. These problems will also deepen in the Middle East, the eastern Mediterranean, and Asia Minor. In a number of countries of Africa whose borders have been artificially drawn we are beginning to see such symptoms as well. Accompanying these breakdowns are large-scale migrations of refugees toward borders, which can threaten the equilibrium of an entire region. With any significant imbalance in China, this phenomenon could spill directly into more than one other area, especially in light of the present instability in the former Soviet Union and the countries of continental Asia.

In the meantime, the regional centers of economic and technological power have become configured: the Far East, led by Japan; Europe; and the United States. While the rise and influence of these regions exhibits an apparent polycentrism, events demonstrate that the United States with its military might in addition to its technological, economic, and political power is now in a position to control the world's key lines and areas of supply.

In the process of increasing globalization, this lone remaining superpower is emerging as the governing force in present events, whether the other regional powers like it or not. This is the ultimate meaning of the New World Order.

It seems that we have yet to reach a time of peace, although the threat of world war has receded for now. Local, ethnic, and religious upheavals, social unrest, mass migrations, and limited wars still appear to threaten the supposed present stability. As the less wealthy areas fall still further behind the growth of the technologically and economically accelerated areas, they become more "out of phase," which only compounds their problems. Latin America is a case in point, for even as the economies of various countries experience important growth in coming years, their dependence on the centers of power will be increasingly evident.

As the regional and world power of multinational companies continues to grow, as international finance capital continues to concentrate, political systems lose autonomy and their legislation must adapt to the dictates of these new powers.

Today we see the functions of increasing numbers of institutions being directly or indirectly supplanted by various departments or foundations of the Company, which in some areas has developed the means to oversee everything from cradle to grave for both employees and their children: birth, education, career placement, news and information, marriage, recreation, social security, retirement, death, and burial.

There are already places where citizens can avoid old-fashioned bureaucratic paperwork and get by with only a credit card and, increasingly, with just electronic money. And when people use electronic money, a record is made of not only their expenditures and deposits, but also of a wealth of other pertinent information on their background, habits, movements, present status, and so forth, all duly computerized. Of course, while this does free some people from a few minor delays and concerns, these personal conveniences also serve a disguised system of control. Along with the growth in technology and the accelerating rhythm of life, political participation diminishes and decision-making power becomes ever more remote and intermediated.

The family is shrinking and flying apart into the minimum unit of increasingly mobile and changeable couples. As interpersonal communication becomes blocked, friendship disappears, and competition poisons all human relationships to the point that no one trusts anyone else. The sensation of insecurity that people are feeling is no longer rooted in the objective fact of rising crime and violence, but stems above all from their state of mind. It must be added that social, group, and interpersonal solidarity are rapidly disappearing, that drug addiction and alcoholism are continuing to spread devastation, and that suicide and mental illness are spiraling dangerously upward. Of course, everywhere there is still a healthy and reasonable majority, but the symptoms of such advanced disarticulation no longer allow us to speak of a healthy society.

The landscape of formation in which the new generations have grown up contains all the elements of crisis previously cited, and these elements form part of their lives just as much as their technical and career training, as much as elements like soap operas, the advice of celebrity experts in the mass media, affirmations about what a perfect world we live in and, for more privileged youth, the diversions of motorcycles, travel, clothes, sports, music, and electronic gadgets. The problem of this landscape of formation in the new generations threatens to widen the already enormous gap between sectors of different ages, bringing to the fore a virulent generational dialectic of both great depth and vast geographical extension.

It is clear that the myth of money has long since been incorporated at the pinnacle of the scale of values, with everything else increasingly subordinated to it. A large segment of society does not want to hear about anything that could remind them of old age or death, shunning any theme related to the meaning and direction of life. And we must recognize that this is not altogether unreasonable, since reflection on these subjects in no way coincides with the scale of values established in the present system.

The symptoms of the crisis are by now too serious to disregard, yet some will maintain that this is simply the price we must pay in order to exist at the close of the twentieth century. Others affirm that we are entering the best of all possible worlds. The background for both of these affirmations comes from this particular historical moment, when the whole scheme of things has not yet entered crisis, although particular crises are proliferating rapidly. People’s appreciation of events will change, however, as the symptoms of disintegration accelerate and they feel the growing need to establish new priorities and new projects in life.

4. Positive Factors of Change

One cannot question the entire development of science and technology simply because some advances have been or are being employed against life and the well-being of all. In any questioning of science and technology one must first reflect on the characteristics of the prevailing system, which all too often applies advances in knowledge toward spurious ends.

Progress in medicine, communications, robotics, genetic engineering, and myriad other fields can of course be applied in a destructive direction. The same holds true of employing technology in the irrational exploitation of natural resources and the generation of industrial pollution, with attendant widespread contamination and deterioration of the physical environment. All such misuse of technology constitutes a grave indictment of the negative character that now commands both the economy and social systems.

Today it is clear that society has the capacity to solve the problems entailed in feeding all of humanity, and yet every day we see starvation, malnutrition, and inhuman suffering increase around us. In short, the established system is not disposed to face these problems and relinquish its fabulous profits in exchange for an overall improvement in the human condition and standard of living.

It must also be pointed out that the process carrying us toward regionalization and finally globalization is being manipulated by special interests to the detriment of humanity as a whole. It is clear, however, that even burdened with such distortions this process is opening the way toward a *universal human nation*. The accelerated change taking place in today's world is leading to a global crisis for the system and a consequent reordering of many factors. And all of this will be the necessary condition to reach a reasonable stability and harmonious development of the planet.

Accordingly, despite the tragedies that can be anticipated as the present global system deteriorates, the human species will prevail over all particular interests. This faith in the future is rooted in an understanding of the direction of history that began with our hominid ancestors. This species, which has worked and struggled over the course of millions of years to surmount pain and suffering, is not now going to yield to the absurd. This is why we need to understand processes that are more ample than simple immediate circumstance, and to support, even if we do not see immediate results, everything that goes in the direction of evolution.

When courageous human beings who are moved by a spirit of solidarity become disheartened, this slows the march of history. But it is difficult to grasp this broader meaning if one does not also organize and orient one's personal life in a positive direction. What is at work here is not the interplay of mechanical factors or historical determinism—it is human intention, which tends to make its way through all difficulties.

I hope, my friends, to move on in the next letter to other more reassuring topics, leaving aside observations concerning such negative factors in order to outline proposals that correspond to our faith in a better future for all.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

December 5, 1991

Third Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

I hope that this letter will help simplify and give order to my views on the present state of affairs. In it I also want to consider some important aspects of the relationships between individuals and between individuals and the social environments in which they live.

1. Change and Crisis

In this time of great change, individuals, institutions, and society all find themselves in crisis. And the pace of change—and the intensity of these individual, institutional, and social crises—will only continue to increase. This portends further upheaval, which broad sectors of society will perhaps be unable to assimilate.

2. Disorientation

Today's transformations are taking unexpected turns, resulting in widespread disorientation about the future and confusion about what to do in the present. In reality, it is not change itself that is so disturbing to us, because we can recognize many positive things in contemporary developments. What is troubling is not knowing in what direction these changes are heading, and therefore not knowing in what direction to orient our actions.

3. Crisis in the Life of Each Person

Everything around us—the economy, technology, society—is undergoing enormous transformations. But above all it is in our own lives that we experience these changes: in our workplaces, our families, our friendships, and not least in our ideas and what we believe about the world, other people, and ourselves. Amid the rush of events we find many things exciting, yet other things confuse or paralyze us. Our own behavior and that of others all too often seems incoherent, contradictory, and as lacking in any clear direction as the events around us.

4. The Need to Give Direction to One's Life

Since change is inevitable, it is of fundamental importance to guide it, and there is no other way than to begin with oneself. One must find in oneself a direction for this chaotic change, whose future course is unknown to us.

5. Direction in Life and Changing One's Situation

Individuals do not exist in isolation. Thus, if they truly give their lives direction, this will change their relationships with the people in their families, their workplaces, and everywhere they carry out their activities. Giving direction to one's life is not simply a psychological problem that can be resolved within the head of an isolated individual; on the contrary, it is resolved by changing—through coherent behavior—the situation in which one lives with others.

When we become excited by our successes or depressed by our failures, when we make plans for the future or resolve to change our lives, we often forget the fundamental point: The situation in which we live involves relationships with others. We can neither explain what happens to us nor make any choice in our lives without also including certain people and concrete social ambits. Those people who are of special importance to us and the social environments in which we live place each of us in a particular situation, and it is from this situation that each of us thinks, feels, and acts. To deny this or to disregard it creates enormous difficulties both for us and for others. One's freedom to choose and to act is delimited by these circumstances. Any change one desires to make cannot be proposed in the abstract but only with reference to the actual situation in which one lives.

6. Coherent Behavior

If my thoughts, my feelings, and my actions are in agreement, if they all go in the same direction, if my actions do not create contradiction with what I feel, then I can say that my life has coherence. But though I am true to myself, this does not necessarily mean I am being true to those in my immediate environment. I still need to achieve this same coherence in my relationships with others, treating them the way I would like to be treated.

Of course there can also be a destructive type of coherence, which can be seen in those who are racists or fanatics or in those who are violent or exploit others. It is clear, however, that *their relationships with others are incoherent*, because they treat others very differently from the way they desire to be treated themselves.

That unity of thought, feeling, and action, that unity between the treatment one asks from others and the treatment one gives to others—these are ideals that are not realized in everyday life. Here is the point: to adjust one's conduct in the direction of these personal and social proposals. These values, taken seriously, give life a direction that is independent of any difficulties one may face in realizing them. If we observe things well—not in static but in dynamic—we will understand this as a strategy that continues to gain ground as time passes. Here, one's intentions *do* matter (even though one's actions may at first not coincide with them), especially if these intentions are sustained, perfected, and extended. These images of what one wants to achieve are firm references that give direction in every situation.

What is being proposed here is not very complicated. We are not surprised, for example, when people dedicate their lives to pursuing great wealth, even when they lack any tangible reason to believe they will achieve it. This ideal spurs them on, despite the absence of relevant results. Why, then, is it so difficult to understand that these ideals of how to treat others and personal coherence can provide a clear direction for human conduct? And these ideals can give one direction despite the fact that these times are neither conducive to having the treatment one asks correspond to the treatment one gives nor to having one's thoughts, feelings, and actions be in agreement.

7. The Two Proposals: Coherence and Solidarity

To have one's thoughts, feelings, and actions go in the same direction and to treat others as one wants to be treated—these two proposals are so simple they can be viewed as mere naiveté by people accustomed to the usual complications. Yet underlying this seeming simplicity lies a new scale of values in which coherence comes first, a new morality in which one's actions are not a matter of indifference, and a new aspiration that entails a consistent effort to give

direction to human events. Behind this apparent simplicity one is either staking one's future on a meaning in life that will be truly evolutionary, both personally and for society, or one is following a path that leads toward disintegration.

As mistrust, isolation, and individualism increase, they erode the fabric of society, and we can no longer rely on old values to provide the cohesion among people that is so essential. The traditional solidarity found among members of a given class, or within associations, institutions, and groups is rapidly being replaced by a savage competition, from which not even the closest bonds of marriage or family escape.

As this process mechanically proceeds to dismantle social structures, a new solidarity cannot arise out of the ideas and conduct of a world that has already disappeared—it can come only from the concrete need that people have to give direction to their lives. And this new direction will entail changing the environment in which they live. This change in their environment, if it is to be true and profound, cannot be imposed from without, cannot be set in motion by external laws or any form of fanaticism. It can only come from the power of shared opinion and minimum collective action with the people who make up the social environment around them.

8. Reaching All of Society Starting with One's Immediate Environment

We know that by changing our situation in positive ways we will be influencing our surroundings, and that others will share this point of view and form of action, giving rise to a growing system of human relationships.

So we must ask ourselves: Why should we go beyond the immediate environment where we begin? The answer is simple: To be coherent with the proposal of treating others in the same way we want them to treat us. Why wouldn't we pass on to others something that has proven to be of fundamental importance in our own lives?

If our influence begins to expand, it means that our relationships and therefore the constituents of our environment have also developed. This is a factor we need to bear in mind right from the first, because even though our actions may begin in one small area, their influence can project very far. And there is nothing strange in thinking that others will decide to accompany us in this direction. After all, the great movements throughout history have followed this same course—logically, they began small, and then developed because people felt these movements interpreted their needs and concerns.

If we are coherent with these proposals we will act in our immediate environments, but with our vision placed on the progress of society as a whole. For what meaning is there in speaking of a global crisis that must be faced with resolution if society is only going to end up as isolated individuals for whom others have no importance?

Out of common need, then, those working together to give a new direction to their lives and to events will create environments for direct communication where they can discuss these themes. Later on, as awareness spreads through many means of communication, this surface of contact will grow. A similar process will occur as people create organizations and institutions compatible with this proposal.

9. The Social Environment in Which One Lives

We have already seen that the impact of this swift and unpredictable change is experienced as crisis—the crisis with which individuals, institutions, and entire societies are now struggling. So, although it is indispensable to give direction to developments, how can one do this, subject as one is to the action of larger events? Clearly, one can direct only the most immediate and nearby aspects of one's life, and not the operation of institutions or society at large. Nor is it easy attempting to give direction to one's life, since no one lives in isolation; everyone lives in some situation, in some environment.

We may think of this environment as the universe, the Earth, our country, state, province, and so on. Each of us has, however, an immediate environment—the environment in which we carry out our daily activities. This is the environment of our family, our work, our friendships, and our other activities. We live in a situation of relationship with other people, and this is our particular world, which we cannot avoid, as it acts on us and we on it in a direct way. Any influence we have is on this immediate environment, and both the influence we exercise on it and the influence it exerts on us are in turn affected by more general situations—by the current disorientation and crisis.

10. Coherence as a Direction in Life

If we want to give a new direction to events, we must begin with our own lives and include the immediate environment in which we carry out our activities. But the question remains: To what direction will we aspire? Without doubt to one that provides coherence and support in such a changeable and unpredictable environment.

To propose that one will think, feel, and act in the same direction is to propose coherence in life. Yet putting this into practice is not easy, because the situations in which we find ourselves are not entirely of our own choosing. We find ourselves doing the things we need to do, even though these things may not at all agree with what we think or what we feel. We find ourselves in situations over which we have no control. To act with coherence, then, is more an intention than a fact—it is a direction, which if kept before us guides our lives toward increasingly coherent conduct.

Clearly, it is only by exerting influence within one's own immediate environment that one will be able to change any aspect of the overall situation in which one lives. In so doing, one will be giving a new direction to one's relationships with others, and they will be included in this new conduct.

Some may object that their employment or other factors cause them to frequently change their residence or other aspects of their lives. But this in no way affects the proposal, for every person is always in some situation, is always part of some environment. If we are striving for coherence, the treatment we afford others must be of the same type as the treatment we demand for ourselves, no matter where we are.

There are, then, in these two proposals the basic elements for giving direction to our lives to the extent of our strength and possibilities. Coherence advances as a person is increasingly able to think, feel, and act in the same direction. And we extend this coherence to others—because only in this way are we ourselves being coherent. And in extending this to others we begin to treat other people the way we would like to be treated. Coherence and solidarity are directions, they represent conduct to which we aspire.

11. Proportion in One's Actions as a Step Toward Coherence

How can we advance in the direction of coherence? First, we need to maintain a certain proportion in the activities of our daily lives. We need to establish which among all the things we do are most important. For our lives to function well, we need to give the highest priority to what is of fundamental importance, less to secondary things, and so on. It could turn out that simply by taking care of two or three main priorities we will achieve a well-balanced situation.

We cannot allow our priorities to be turned upside down or to become so fragmented that our lives grow out of balance. To avoid having some activities proceed far ahead while others fall too far behind, we need to develop all of our activities as a connected whole and not as isolated actions. It is all too easy to become blinded by the importance of one activity and to allow this single priority to unbalance all of our other activities. And then, because our whole situation has been jeopardized, in the end we fail to accomplish what we had considered so important.

It is true that at times urgent matters arise that we need to deal with right away, but it should be clear that this in no way means we can go on indefinitely postponing the things necessary to maintain the overall situation in which we live. It is a significant step in the direction of coherence to establish our priorities, and then to carry out our activities in appropriate proportion.

12. Well-Timed Actions as a Step Toward Coherence

There is a daily routine we follow that is set by schedules and timetables, our personal needs, and the workings of the environment in which we live. Yet within this framework there is a dynamic interplay and richness of events that go unappreciated by superficial people. There are some who confuse their routines with their lives, but they are in no way the same, and quite often people must make choices among the routines or conditions imposed on them by their environment.

Certainly it is true that we live amid inconveniences and contradictions, but it is important not to confuse these things. *Inconveniences* are simply the annoyances and impediments that we all face. While they are not terribly serious, of course if they are numerous or repeated they can increase our irritation and fatigue. Without question we have the capacity to overcome them. They neither determine the direction of our lives nor stop us from carrying a project forward. They are simply obstacles along the way that range from the minor physical difficulty to larger problems that may nearly cause us to lose our way. While there are important differences in degree among inconveniences, they all lie within the range of things that do not stop us from going forward.

Something quite different happens with what are called *contradictions*. When we are unable to carry out our central project, when events propel us in a direction away from what we desire, when we find ourselves trapped in a vicious circle from which we cannot escape, when we do not have even minimal control over our lives, then we are ensnared by contradiction.

In the stream of life, contradiction is a sort of countercurrent that carries us backward in hopeless retreat. This is incoherence in its crudest form. In a situation of contradiction, one's thoughts, feelings, and actions oppose each other. And though in spite of everything it is always possible to give direction to one's life, one has to know *when* to act.

In the routine of daily life we often lose sight of whether or not our actions are timely, and this occurs because so many of the things we do are codified or set by convention. But when it comes to major difficulties and contradictions, we must not make decisions that expose us to catastrophe.

In general terms, what we need to do is to retreat when faced with a great force, and then advance with resolution when this force has weakened. There is, however, a great difference between the timid, who retreat or become paralyzed when faced with any difficulty, and those who take action to surmount the difficulties, knowing that it is precisely by advancing that they will be able to get through the problems.

At times it may happen that it is not possible to go forward immediately because a problem arises that is beyond our strength, and to tackle it head on without due care could lead to disaster. This problem we are facing that is now so large is also, however, dynamic, and the relationship of forces will change, either because our influence grows or because the problem's influence weakens. Once the previous balance of forces has shifted in our favor, that is the moment to advance with resolution, for indecision or delay at that point will only allow further and perhaps unfavorable changes in the balance of forces. Well-timed action is the best tool to produce a change in the direction of one's life.

13. Growing Adaptation as an Advance Toward Coherence

Let us further consider the theme of direction in life—of the coherence we want to achieve. To propose a direction toward coherence raises the question: To which situations should we adapt?

To adapt to things that lead away from coherence would, of course, be highly incoherent, and opportunists suffer from a serious shortsightedness on precisely this point. They believe that the best way to live is simply to accept everything, to adapt to everything. They think that to accept everything, as long as it comes from those with power, is to be well-adapted. But it is clear that their lives of dependence are very far removed from what could be understood as coherence.

It is useful to distinguish three kinds of adaptation: being *unadapted*, which stops us from extending our influence; *decreasing adaptation*, in which we do not go beyond accepting the established conditions in our environment; and *growing adaptation*, through which we build our influence in the direction of the proposals outlined here.

To close, let us synthesize the themes of this letter:

1. Driven by the technological revolution, the world is undergoing rapid change, which is colliding with established structures and the formative experience and habits of life of both individuals and societies.
2. As change makes more factors in society become "out of phase," this generates growing crises in every field, and there is no reason to suppose this will diminish; on the contrary it will tend to intensify.
3. The unexpectedness of today's events clouds our ability to foresee the direction that these events, the people around us, and ultimately our own lives will take.
4. Many of the things we used to think and to believe in no longer work. Nor do we see adequate solutions forthcoming from any society, any institution, or any individual—all of whom suffer the same ills.

5. If one decides to stand up to these problems, one must give direction to one's life, striving for coherence among one's thoughts, feelings, and actions. And because we do not live in isolation, we must extend this coherence to our relationships with others, treating them as we want to be treated. While it is not possible to fulfill these two proposals rigorously, nonetheless they constitute the direction in which we need to advance, which we will be able to accomplish above all if we make these proposals permanent references, reflecting on them deeply.
6. We live in immediate relationship with others, and it is in this environment that we must act to give a favorable direction to our lives. This is not a psychological question, a matter that can be resolved solely in the head of an isolated individual, it is related to the concrete situation in which each of us lives.
7. Being consistent with the proposals we are attempting to carry forward leads us to the conclusion that it would be useful to extend to society as a whole those elements that are positive for ourselves and our immediate environment. Together with others who are moving in this direction, we will put into practice the most appropriate means to allow a new form of solidarity to find expression. Thus, even when we act very specifically in our own immediate environment we will not lose sight of the global situation that affects all human beings and that requires our help, just as we need the help of others.
8. The precipitous changes in today's world lead us to seriously propose the need for a new direction in life.
9. Coherence does not begin and end in oneself, rather it is related to one's social environment, to other people. Solidarity is an aspect of personal coherence.
10. Proportion in one's activities consists of establishing one's priorities in life, of not letting them grow out of balance, and basing one's actions on these priorities.
11. Well-timed actions involve retreating when faced with a great force, and advancing with resolution when it weakens. When one is subject to contradiction, this idea is important in making a change of direction in one's life.
12. It is unwise to be unadapted to our environment, which leaves us without the capacity to change anything. It is equally unwise to follow a course of decreasing adaptation to an environment in which we limit ourselves to accepting the established conditions. Growing adaptation consists of increasing the influence we have in our environment as we advance in the direction of coherence.

    With this letter I send my warmest regards,

    Silo

    December 17, 1991

Fourth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

In previous letters I have given my views on society, human groups, and individuals in relation to this moment of change and loss of references in which we happen to live. I critiqued certain negative tendencies in the development of events and outlined the better-known positions held by those who claim to have answers to the urgent concerns of these times.

It should be clear that all of these considerations, whether well or badly formulated, correspond to my particular point of view, and this in turn finds its foundation in a certain set of ideas. No doubt due to an awareness of this on the part of some of my correspondents, I have received encouragement to make more explicit from what point of view, from “where,” my critiques and proposals are developed.

After all, in the course of our daily lives ideas occur to us that may or may not be very original, but that in any case we don’t claim to justify. And increasingly we find that we hold one idea today and the opposite one tomorrow, without going beyond the capriciousness of an everyday appreciation of things. Each day, then, we believe less—not only in the opinions of others but even in our own—as we become accustomed to seeing opinions as something transient, changing from hour to hour as they fluctuate with the volatility of the stock market. And if, among these varied opinions, some do possess greater permanence, it is only because they are consecrated by the fashion of the day, which will always be replaced by the fashion of tomorrow.

I am not defending the value of unchanging opinions, I am simply pointing out the current lack of consistency among opinions generally. In truth it would be very interesting for changes in people’s opinions to come about based on an internal logic and not simply as though bending before every erratic wind. But who today has any taste for internal logic, with so many flailing around as though drowning in these turbulent times. Even as I write this, I am keenly aware that what I say will not even be able to enter the heads of certain readers, because they will have failed to find one of the three possible codes they demand, which are: (1) that this letter provides them with entertainment; (2) that this letter provides them with something they can use at once in their business; or (3) that this letter coincides with what is consecrated by fashion.

I am certain that these few paragraphs beginning with “Dear Friends” and extending to here will leave some readers as thoroughly bewildered as if they were written in Sanskrit. Yet every day these same persons understand matters of great difficulty, ranging from sophisticated banking operations to the exquisite niceties of computer network administration. Somehow, however, such people find it impossible to understand that in this letter I am speaking of opinions, of certain points of view, and of the ideas that serve as their foundation—and of the impossibility that they will understand even the simplest of these things if these matters do not correspond to the landscape they have assembled in the course of their educations and their compulsions. So this is how things stand!

Having addressed that question, I will now try to summarize in this letter the ideas that form the foundation of my views, critiques, and proposals. In presenting things I will exercise care not to go much beyond the level of advertising slogans because, as we are cautioned by many learned and expert journalists, organized ideas are “ideologies,” and these, like doctrines, are today only instruments of brainwashing employed by those who oppose free trade and social

economics in the marketplace of opinion, which these guardians so carefully regulate for our benefit.

Those people who conform to the demands of postmodernism today—who heed the requisites of *haute couture* with evening wear, flashy ties, shoulder pads, running shoes, and dapper jackets, who follow the dictums of deconstructionist architecture and destructured decor—demand of us that the elements of our discourse not fit together. And let us not forget that their critique of language repudiates as well all that is systematic, all that is structural, and everything related to processes!

Of course, it will come as no surprise that this position corresponds to the dominant ideology of the Company, in whose representatives there is a horror of history, just as they are horrified at ideas in whose formation they have not had a hand and in which they have not been able to purchase a substantial percentage of shares.

All bantering aside, let us now begin with a brief inventory of our ideas, at least those that seem most important. [Much of the following was included in a talk given by the author in Santiago, Chile, on May 23, 1991].

1. The Starting Point for Our Ideas

We do not initiate our conception of things with the affirmation of generalities, but rather in the study of the particulars of human life: what is particular to existence, what is particular to the personal register of thinking, feeling, and acting. This initial position means that the conception outlined here is incompatible with any system that starts from an *idea*, the *material*, the *unconscious*, the *will*, *society*, and so forth.

If someone accepts or rejects a given conception of things—however logical or eccentric it may be—it is always the person who is in play, accepting or rejecting this conception. The person does this, not society, or the unconscious, or matter.

Let us speak, then, of human life. When I observe myself, not from a physiological point of view but from an existential one, I find myself here, in a world that is given, neither made nor chosen by me. I find that I am in situation with, in relationship with phenomena that, beginning with my own body, are inescapable. My body is at once the fundamental constituent of my existence and, at the same time, a phenomenon homogenous with the natural world in which it acts and on which the world acts. But the nature of my body has important differences for me from other phenomena, to wit: (1) I have an immediate register of my body; (2) I have a register, mediated by my body, of external phenomena; and (3) some of my body's operations are accessible to my immediate intention.

2. The Human Being: Nature, Intention, and Opening

It happens, however, that the world appears not simply as a conglomeration of natural objects, it appears as an articulation of other human beings and of objects, signs, and codes they have produced or modified. The intention that I am aware of in myself appears as a fundamental element for the interpretation of the behavior of others, and just as I constitute the social world by comprehending intentions, so am I constituted by it.

Of course, I am speaking here of intentions that manifest in corporal action. It is through the corporal expressions of, or by perceiving the situation of the other, that I am able to comprehend the meanings of the other, the intention of the other. Moreover, natural or human objects appear

as either pleasurable or painful to me, and so I modify my situation, trying to place myself in favorable relationship to them.

In this way, I am not closed to the world of the natural and other human beings, rather precisely what characterizes me is *opening.* My consciousness has been configured intersubjectively in that it uses codes of reasoning, emotional models, and schemes of action that I register as "mine," but that I also recognize in others. And, of course, my body is open to the world insofar as I both perceive and act over the world.

The natural world, as distinct from the human, appears to me as without intention. Of course, I can imagine that the stones, plants, and stars possess intention, but I find no way to hold an effective dialogue with them. Even those animals in which at times I glimpse the spark of intelligence appear as basically impenetrable to me and changing only slowly from within their own natures. I observe insect societies that are completely structured, higher mammals that employ rudimentary technology, but still only replicate such codes in a slow process of genetic change, as if they were always the first representatives of their respective species. And when I observe the benefits of those plants and animals that have been modified and domesticated by humanity, I see human intention opening its way and humanizing the world.

3. The Human Being: Social and Historical Opening

To define human beings in terms of their sociability seems to be inadequate, because this does not distinguish them from many other species. Nor does capacity for work stand out as their most notable characteristic when compared to that of more powerful animals. Not even language defines them in their essence, for we know of numerous animals that use various codes and forms of communication.

All new human beings, in contrast, find themselves living in a world that is modified by others, and it is in their being constituted by this world of intentions that I discover their human capacity of accumulation within and incorporation to the temporal—that is, I discover not simply a social dimension but a socio-historical one.

Viewing things in this way, we can attempt a definition of the human being as follows: *Human beings are historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature.* If I accept the above, I will also have to accept that such beings are capable of intentionally transforming their own physical constitutions. And this is just what is taking place.

This process began with the use of instruments by human beings which, placed before their bodies as external "prostheses," allowed them to extend the reach of their hands and their senses and to increase both their capacity for work and its quality. Although not endowed by nature to function in either aerial or aquatic environments, they have nevertheless created means to move through these media and have even begun to leave their natural environment, the planet Earth. Today, moreover, they have begun to penetrate their bodies, replacing organs, intervening in their brain chemistry, carrying out fertilization *in vitro,* and even manipulating their own genes.

If by the word "nature" one is trying to indicate something permanent and unchanging, then today this idea has been rendered seriously inadequate, even when applied to what is most object-like about human beings, that is, to their bodies. And in light of this, regarding any "natural morality," "natural law," or "natural institutions," it is clear that nothing in this field exists through nature, but on the contrary that everything is socio-historical.

4. The Transforming Action of the Human Being

Along with the conception of a human nature is another prevalent conception that has asserted the passivity of the consciousness. This ideology has considered the human being to be an entity that functions primarily in response to stimuli from the natural world. What began as crude sensualism has gradually been displaced by historicist currents that, at their core, have preserved the same conception of a passive consciousness. And even when they have emphasized the consciousness's activity in and transformation of the world more than the interpretation of its activities, they have still conceived of its activity as resulting from conditions external to the consciousness.

Today, these old prejudices regarding human nature and the passivity of the consciousness are once again being asserted, this time transformed into neo-evolutionary theories embodying such views as natural selection, determined through the struggle for the survival of the fittest.

In the version currently in fashion, now transplanted into the human world, this sort of zoological conception attempts to go beyond earlier dialectics of race or class by asserting a dialectic in which it is supposed that all social activity regulates itself automatically according to "natural" economic laws. Thus, once again, the concrete human being is overwhelmed and objectified.

I have noted those conceptions that, to explain the human being, have begun from theoretical generalities and maintained the existence of an unchanging human nature and a passive consciousness. We maintain, quite the opposite, the need to start from human particularity, that the human being is a socio-historical and non-natural phenomenon, and that the human consciousness is active in transforming the world in accordance with its intention. We see human life as always taking place in situation, and the human body as an immediately perceived natural object, immediately subject as well to numerous dictates of each person's intention. The following questions therefore arise:

• How is it that the consciousness is active; that is, how is it that its intentions can act upon the body, and through the body transform the world?

• How is it that the human being is constituted as a socio-historical being?

These questions must be answered from particular existence so as not to fall again into theoretical generalities, from which a dubious system of interpretation might be derived.

To answer the first question, one must apprehend with immediate evidence how human intention acts over the body. To answer the second, one must begin from evidence of the temporality and intersubjectivity of the human being, rather than beginning from supposed general laws of history and society.

I will not go into greater detail here regarding these questions, as this would take us away from the broad themes of the present letter. For a more extensive treatment I refer you to two essays in the work *Contributions to Thought* that deal with the above questions. The first essay, "Psychology of the Image," studies the function that the image fulfills in the consciousness, highlighting its aptitude for moving the body through space. The second essay, "Historiological Discussions," studies the theme of historicity and sociability.

5. Overcoming Pain and Suffering as Basic Vital Projects

In the work *Contributions to Thought* it is observed that the natural destiny of the human body is the world, and to verify this it is sufficient to observe the body's conformation. The

body's sensory apparatus and those for feeding, locomotion, reproduction, and so on are naturally shaped to be in the world. Further, it is through the body that the image launches its transforming charge—not to copy the world, not to be a reflection of a given situation, but on the contrary to modify a given situation.

In the course of daily events, objects are either limitations on or amplifications of corporal possibilities, and the bodies of others appear as a multiplication of those possibilities insofar as they are governed by intentions that are recognized as similar to those governing one's own body.

Owing to the condition of finiteness and temporo-spatial limitation in which they find themselves and which they register as physical pain and mental suffering, human beings find it necessary to transform both the world and themselves. Overcoming pain is not simply an animal response, then, but a temporal configuration in which the future is paramount, and which becomes transformed into a fundamental impulse of life, even though it may not be present as something urgent at any given moment. In this way, and aside from the immediate, reflex, and natural response to pain, the deferred response to avoid pain is spurred by psychological suffering in the face of danger, re-presented as future possibility or as present fact when pain is present in other human beings.

Overcoming pain, then, appears as a basic project that guides action. This is what has made possible communication among distinct human bodies and intentions in what is known as the *social constitution*. The social constitution is as historical as human life; it configures human life. Its transformation is ongoing, but in a different way than in nature, where change does not occur as the result of intentions.

6. Image, Belief, Look, and Landscape

Let us suppose that one day I go into my room, and I see the window. I recognize it, it is familiar to me. I have not only a fresh perception of it, but also acting in me are my previous perceptions of it which, converted into images, have been retained within me. Suddenly, I notice a crack in one corner of the windowpane. "That wasn't there," I say to myself, on comparing the new perception with what I retain from my previous perceptions. And I also feel a sense of surprise.

The window of previous acts of perception has been retained in me, but not passively as in a photograph, rather actively, in the way that images function. What has been retained in me operates in the present with respect to what I perceive, even though the formation of those retentions pertains to the past. In this way the past is always present, always being updated.

Before entering my room I took it for granted, it was a given, that the window would be there in good condition. It was not that I was thinking about it, but simply that I was counting on it. The window itself was not explicitly present in my thoughts at that moment, rather it was copresent. It was within the horizon of objects contained in my room.

It is due to what is copresent, to this retention that is updated and superimposed on the perception, that the consciousness infers more than it perceives. And it is in this phenomenon that it is possible to see the most elemental functioning of belief. In this example I would say to myself: "I believed the window was in good condition."

If upon entering my room I had seen phenomena proper to a different field of objects, for example a motorboat or a camel, this surrealistic situation would have seemed unbelievable, not because those objects do not exist but simply because their location in my room would be

outside the field of my copresence, outside the landscape I have formed that acts within me, superimposing itself on every single thing that I perceive.

Now then, in any present instant of my consciousness I can observe the intercrossing of what has been retained and what is being futurized in me as they act copresently and in structure. In my consciousness, the present instant is constituted as an active temporal field of three different times. Here things take place very differently from the way they occur in calendar time, where today is separate and distinct from yesterday or tomorrow. On the calendar and on the clock, *now* is different from *no longer* and from *not yet*, and events are ordered one after the other in a linear succession that I cannot claim to be a structure, but is rather a subgroup within a complete series that I call a *calendar*. I will return to these ideas again when we consider the themes of historicity and temporality later on.

For now, let us continue with the previous notion that the consciousness infers more than it perceives, through its use of what comes from the past as retentions, superimposed on present perception. In each *look* or act of looking that I direct toward an object, what I see is distorted. This is not meant in the same sense that modern physics explains our inability to see the atom or wavelengths that lie above or below our thresholds of perception. What I am referring to is the distortion related to the superposition of the images of retentions and futurizations on perceptions in the present.

Thus, when I contemplate a beautiful sunset in the countryside, the natural landscape that I observe is not determined by and in itself. Rather, I determine it, I constitute it through the aesthetic ideal that I hold. And the special peace that I feel gives me the illusion that I contemplate passively, when in reality I am actively superimposing numerous of my own internal contents on the natural object itself. This phenomenon holds not only for the present example, but for all *looks* that I direct toward reality.

7. The Generations and Historical Moments

Social organization continues and expands, but this cannot take place solely through the presence of social objects that have been produced in the past, that we make use of in the present, and that we project into the future. Such a mechanism is too simple to explain the process of civilization.

Continuity is given by the different generations of human beings, which do not exist side by side, separate and apart from each other, but rather coexist, interact, and transform each other. These distinct generations, which make continuity and development possible, are dynamic structures. They are social time in motion, without which civilization would fall into a natural state, losing its character of being a society.

It happens, moreover, that in every historical moment the generations that coexist have distinct temporal levels, retentions, and futurizations that configure different landscapes of situation and belief. For the active generations, the bodies and behavior of children and the elderly constitute a presence that betrays where they have come from and where they are going. So, too, both ends of this triple relationship can recognize their extreme temporal positions. And this situation never stops or remains static, because while the active generations age and the elderly die, the children grow up and begin to occupy active positions. In the meantime, new births continuously reconstitute society.

When, as an abstraction, we “interrupt” this ceaseless flow, we can speak of a certain *historical moment* in which all members located in the same social setting can be considered

contemporaries, living in one same time. But it should be noted that not all contemporaries are coetaneous, that is, they are not all the same age, nor do they have the same internal temporality in terms of landscapes of formation, present situation, and projects. What happens in fact is that a generational dialectic is established between those who are in the “layers” that lie closest to each other and who are trying to occupy the central activity, the social present, in accordance with their different interests and beliefs.

It is this internal social temporality, and not as some philosophies of history would have it the succession of phenomena placed linearly one after another as in calendar time, that structurally explains the historical becoming in which the different generational accumulations—that is, the accumulating landscapes of the distinct generations—interact.

Constituted socially in an historical world in which I continue to configure my landscape, I interpret that toward which I direct my *look*. This is my personal landscape, but it is in addition a collective landscape for large numbers of people in this time.

As has been previously observed, different generations coexist in the same present time. As an elementary example, those who were born before the transistor was invented and those born into the world of computers are both now living in the same moment. Numerous such coexisting configurations differ from each other in their experiences—not only in the ways that they act, but also in how they think and how they feel—and what used to work in one epoch regarding social relationships and modes of production has slowly, or at times abruptly, ceased to function.

People expected a certain result in the future; that future arrived, but things did not turn out as projected. And that former mode of action, that former sensibility, that former ideology—none of these any longer coincide with the new landscape now asserting itself in society.

8. Violence, the State, and the Concentration of Power

Human beings, through their opening, their freedom to choose between situations, their ability both to defer responses and to imagine their future, also have the possibility to negate themselves, to negate aspects of their bodies, to negate their bodies completely as in suicide, or to negate other human beings. It is this freedom that has allowed a few to illegitimately appropriate the social whole, that is, to negate the freedom and intentionality of others, reducing those others to prostheses, to instruments of the intentions of the few. Therein lies the essence of discrimination, with physical, economic, racial, sexual, religious and other forms violence as its methodology.

It is through power over the apparatus of social regulation and control, that is, the State, that violence can be established and perpetuated. Because of this, social organization will require an advanced type of coordination that is safe from any concentration of power, whether private or of the State.

When it is claimed that privatizing all areas of the economy will make society safe from the power of the State, what is not disclosed in this is that the real problem lies in the monopoly or oligopoly, which simply transfers power from the hands of the State to the hands of a Parastate, no longer managed by a bureaucratic minority but now by that private minority itself as it continues to advance this process of concentration.

The various social structures from the most primitive to the most sophisticated are all proceeding toward ever greater concentration. Eventually they will reach the point that they become immobilized and begin a stage of dissolution, a stage that will give rise to new processes of reorganization, but at a higher level than before.

From the beginning of history, society has proceeded toward globalization, and there will come a time of maximum concentration of arbitrary power, displaying the character of a world empire, which will be without any further possibilities of expansion. The collapse of this global system will follow the logic of the structural dynamics of all closed systems, in which disorder necessarily tends to increase.

Just as the process of the current structures tends toward globalization, however, so does the process of humanization proceed toward increasing opening of the human being, moving beyond both the State and Parastate toward decentralization and de-concentration in favor of a superior form of coordination among autonomous social particularities.

Whether everything ends up in chaos and civilization starts anew, or we begin a stage of progressive humanization, does not depend on inexorable mechanical designs, but on the intentions of individuals and peoples, on their commitment to changing the world, and on an ethic of liberty, which by definition is something that cannot be imposed. And we will aspire no longer to formal democracy, controlled until now by the special interests of the various factions, but instead to real democracy in which direct participation can be realized instantaneously, thanks to communication technologies that are every day more able to bring this about.

9. The Human Process

Those who have diminished the humanity of others have in so doing necessarily brought about new pain and suffering, rekindling in the heart of society the age-old struggle against natural adversity—but now between on one side those who wish to “naturalize” other human beings, society, and history, and on the other side the oppressed, who need to humanize themselves in humanizing the world. That is why to humanize is to move beyond objectification to affirm the intentionality of every human being and the primacy of the future over the present situation.

It is the image and representation of a future that is both better and possible that allows the modification of the present and makes every revolution and all change possible. This is why the pressure of oppressive conditions is not in itself sufficient to set change in motion, rather it is necessary to realize that such change is possible and that it depends on human actions.

This struggle is not between mechanical forces, it is not a natural reflex. It is, rather, a struggle between human intentions. And that is precisely what permits us to speak of oppressors and the oppressed, of the just and the unjust, of heroes and cowards. This is the only thing that allows the meaningful practice of social solidarity and commitment to the liberation of those who suffer discrimination, whether they are a majority or a minority.

For more detailed considerations regarding violence, the State, institutions, the law, and religion, and so as not to exceed the limits of this brief letter, I refer you to the work entitled *The Human Landscape.*

I do not believe that the meaning of human actions has to do with senseless upheavals or “useless passions” that end in nothing but absurd disintegration. I believe that the destiny of humanity is oriented by intention, and that as people become increasingly conscious of this intention it opens the way toward a *universal human nation*.

From what we have previously seen **it is abundantly clear that human existence does not simply begin and end in a vicious circle of self-enclosure, and that a life aspiring to coherence must open itself, expanding its influence toward people and social ambits,**

advancing not only a concept or a few ideas but precise actions that extend the growth of freedom.

In the next letter I will leave aside these strictly doctrinal themes in order to focus once more on themes involving the current situation and personal action in the social world.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

December 19, 1991

Fifth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

Along with many people who are concerned about the unfolding of present-day events, I frequently find myself in the company of those who have been active in progressive political parties and organizations. Many of them have yet to recover from the shock they received with the fall of “real socialism.” Today, all over the world, activists by the hundreds of thousands are choosing to withdraw into the concerns of their daily lives, making it understood with this attitude that they believe their old ideals have been foreclosed. What for us represented simply one more episode in the disintegration of centralized structures—indeed something anticipated for over two decades—came for them as an unexpected catastrophe.

Yet this is not the time for everyone to simply drop out of sight, because as the current political form dissolves this leaves a disparity of forces that is opening the way for a system that is monstrous in both its conduct and its direction.

A couple of years ago I attended a rally where older workers, working mothers with their children, and small groups of young people raised their clenched fists together as they sang the words to their anthem in unison. Their banners were waving as the echoes of their glorious calls to struggle rolled across the scene. And upon seeing this I thought of just how much good will, risk, tragedy, and striving, all moved by heartfelt convictions, had been lost along a road leading to the absurd negation of any possibilities of transformation.

How much I would have liked to accompany that moving scene with a song to the ideals of old militants—those who, giving no thought to the outcome, remained steadfast in their combative pride. And all of this gave rise in me to strongly mixed feelings, and today at a distance I ask myself: What has happened to the many good people who struggled in solidarity for something greater than their own immediate interests, for what they believed would be the best of worlds? I am thinking not only of those who were members of more or less institutionalized political parties, but of all those who chose to place their lives at the service of a cause they believed was just. And, of course, one cannot take their measure solely by cataloguing their errors or by classifying them as the exponents of a particular political philosophy. Today it is imperative to redeem human courage, inspiring people’s ideals in a new and possible direction.

In reading over the first part of this letter, I must apologize to those who, not having participated in those movements and activities, may feel removed from such themes. At the same time I would point out to them the importance of keeping these matters in mind—matters that bear so directly on the values and ideals of human actions. These, then, are the themes with which today’s letter deals, perhaps a bit firmly, but with the intention of shaking off the defeatism that seems to have taken such deep hold in the militant soul.

1. The Most Important Issue: To Know If One Wants to Live, and In What Conditions

Today, millions of people struggle simply to subsist, not knowing whether tomorrow they will be able to surmount hunger, disease, and neglect. Their needs are so dire that whatever they undertake to escape their problems only further complicates their lives. Are they to do nothing

then, and remain in a state that is really only one of postponed suicide? Are they to attempt desperate measures? What sort of activity, what risk, what prospect are they prepared to face? What are those, who for economic, societal, or simply personal reasons find themselves in extreme situations, supposed to do? Always, the most important question is to know if one wants to live, and to decide in what conditions to do so.

2. Human Liberty: Source of All Meaning

Even those who do not find themselves in extreme situations are today questioning whether their present circumstances can form a way of life in the future. Even those who prefer not to think about their situation, or who turn this responsibility over to others, are still choosing a way of life. Thus, freedom of choice is a reality from the moment we question our lives and reflect on the conditions in which we want to live. Whether we then struggle for that future or not, this freedom of choice still exists. And it is only this fact of human life that can justify the existence of values, of morality, of law, and of obligation, just as it also allows us to refute all politics, all forms of social organization, and every way of life that is imposed without justifying its meaning, without substantiating just how it is at the service of the concrete human being in today's world. Any morality, any law, or any social constitution that begins from principles supposedly superior to human life places that life in a situation of contingency, denying its essential meaning of liberty.

3. Intention: Orientor of Action

We are born into conditions that we have not chosen. We have not chosen our body, our natural environment, our society, or the space and time we have either the luck or the misfortune to occupy. Subsequently, there is a point at which we acquire the liberty to commit suicide or to go on living and to reflect on the conditions in which we want to live. We can rebel against a tyranny and be victorious or die in the attempt; we can struggle for a cause or facilitate oppression; we can accept a model of life or try to change it. And we can also make a mistake in our choice.

We may believe that by accepting everything that is established in a society, no matter how perverse those things are, we are becoming more perfectly adapted, and this is the path to better conditions in our lives. Or instead, we may think that by questioning everything, without distinguishing between what is of primary importance and what is secondary, we will expand the range of our liberty—when in reality our power to change things diminishes in a phenomenon in which we become increasingly less adapted. Finally, we can give priority to actions that extend our influence in a new direction, one that is possible for us, one that gives meaning to our existence. In every case, we will have to choose among conditions, among needs, and we will do so according to our intention and the vision of life that we propose for ourselves. Of course, our intention itself can continue to change along this path that is so subject to accidents.

4. What Should We Do with Our Lives?

We cannot ask ourselves this question in the abstract, but only in relation to the concrete situation in which we live and the conditions in which we wish to live. For now, we exist in a particular society and in relationship with other people, and our destinies are interwoven with their destinies. If we believe that at present everything is fine and what we can glimpse of the

future seems satisfactory for us as individuals and for society, then we need only forge ahead, perhaps with some minor reforms, but certainly in the same direction. If, on the contrary, we think that we live in a violent, unjust society that is filled with inequity and assailed by unremitting crises related to the dizzying changes in the world, then we will reflect at once on the need for profound personal and social transformations.

Affected by the global crisis now sweeping us along, we lose stable references, and planning our futures becomes ever more difficult. More serious still is our inability to carry out coherent action to change this situation, both because the familiar forms of struggle have failed and also because the unraveling of the social fabric makes it increasingly difficult to mobilize significant numbers of people.

Of course, the same thing happens to us that happens to everyone who is experiencing the present difficulties and intuitively grasps just how much conditions are deteriorating. No one can or would want to undertake actions that are destined to fail, and yet no one can simply let things go on this way.

And the worst of it is that by our inaction we open the door to even greater inequity and injustice. Forms of discrimination and abuse long thought overcome are resurfacing with greater virulence than ever. Given such disorientation and crisis, what is to prevent new monstrosities from acting as social references, forms whose representatives will not only state but also enforce what each and every one of us is to do? Such primitive occurrences are becoming more possible than ever because today their simplistic message spreads so easily, reaching those who find themselves in extreme situations.

More and more people, whether well or poorly informed, have come to recognize that by now we are in a situation of crisis that can be characterized in approximately the terms used here. Nevertheless, the option they are following with increasing single-mindedness is to focus only on their own lives, ignoring the difficulties of others and everything that is taking place in the social context around them.

Many times, while we applaud the objections that others make against the prevailing system, we ourselves are very far from trying to do anything that could actually change those conditions. We know that today democracy is merely formal, responding as it does to the dictates of the economic interests. Yet, subject to the blackmail of either supporting that system or facilitating the rise of dictatorships, we salve our consciences with ridiculous votes for major parties.

It is not reasonable to believe that the act of voting for and asking others to vote for small parties can constitute a phenomenon of interest in the future, nor will support for forming labor organizations outside the established frameworks be an important factor in bringing people together.

And because we view such work as too limited, we reject those efforts that are rooted in neighborhoods, in communities, in urban areas, and in our immediate environments. It is clear, however, that this is where the rebuilding of the social fabric will begin when the crisis finally overtakes the centralized structures.

Yet instead of keeping our ears attuned to the undercurrent of the people's demands for change, we prefer to focus on the superficial game of the powerful elites, the famous, the formers of opinion. We object to the actions of the mass media controlled by economic interests, instead of dedicating ourselves to exercising influence in the smaller media and taking advantage of the many openings for social communication. And if we continue to work as militants within some progressive political organization, our usual

tactic is to try to dredge up some incoherent character who can get us "press," some famous personality who can represent our current of thought because he is more or less palatable to the news media of the prevailing system.

Basically, all of this happens to us because we believe we are defeated and that we have no other recourse than to nurse our growing bitterness in silence. And we call this defeat "dedicating ourselves to our own lives." Meanwhile, "our own lives" accumulate contradictions as we lose touch with the meaning of and any capacity to choose the conditions in which we want to live. Eventually, we cannot even conceive of the possibility of a great *movement for change* that can serve as a reference, drawing together the most positive factors in society. And of course our previous disappointments keep us from acting as protagonists in this process of transformation.

5. Moral Consciousness and Short-Term Interests

We have to choose the conditions in which we want to live. If we go against our life project we will not escape from contradiction, which will leave us at the mercy of a long chain of accidents. In taking that direction, what brake can we then apply to slow the cascading events of our lives? Only that of our short-term interests. In our resulting lives of expediency, then, we can imagine extreme situations of every kind befalling us, from which in our rush to escape we will sacrifice every value and all meaning, because our sole focus has become our own immediate benefit.

To avoid such difficulties, we shun any commitment that could draw us toward extreme situations, but of course events themselves will necessarily put us in positions that we have not chosen. It does not require any special brilliance to understand what is sure to happen with those closest to us should they adopt this same position—if they pursue identical benefits, will they not then be in opposition to us? And what is to prevent our whole society from following this same path? In this situation of arbitrariness without limits, naked power will overwhelm everything before it. Where it encounters resistance it will do so with overt violence. Where it doesn't, it will make do with persuasion that relies for justification on untenable values, to which we will all have to submit, even while in the depths of our hearts we experience how meaningless life has become. And if this comes to pass it will mark the triumph of the Earth's dehumanization.

To choose a life project within imposed conditions is far from being a simple animal reflex. On the contrary, it is the essential characteristic of the human being. And if we eliminate this quality—which defines the human being—we block human history, and we can expect only the advance of destruction at every step. If we give up the right to choose a life project and an ideal of society, we will find ourselves left with only caricatures of law, values, and meaning. Under such circumstances, what will we then uphold in the face of the neurosis and upheaval we are beginning to experience all around us?

Each of us will have to see what to do with his or her own life, but all of us will have to bear in mind as well that our actions extend beyond ourselves, and this is so regardless of whether our capacity to influence others is great or small. The choice between unifying actions—those with meaning—or contradictory actions dictated by immediacy, is inescapable in every situation in which the direction of life is at issue.

6. Sacrificing One's Objectives for Circumstantial Success: Some Habitual Errors

Everyone who is committed to collective action, every person who works with others toward meaningful social objectives, needs to be clear on the numerous errors that have in the past brought ruin upon the best of causes. Ridiculous Machiavellian schemes, personality clashes placed above mutually agreed upon goals, and authoritarian behavior of every stripe fill volumes of history books, as well as our personal memories.

By what right does anyone use a doctrine, a plan of action, a human organization, only to push aside the priorities they themselves have expressed? What right do we have to propose to others an objective and a destiny, only to later place as the primary value some supposed success or need of the moment? What would be the difference between this and the pragmatism we say we repudiate? In following that path, how could there be any coherence among what one thinks, feels, and does?

In every age, "instrumentalists" have committed the same moral fraud of presenting others with an inspiring image of the future, gaining for themselves an immediate image of success. In then sacrificing the intention agreed upon, however, they open the door to negotiating every sort of betrayal with the faction against which they claim to struggle. And this indecency is then justified by some supposed "need" concealed within the initial proposal.

It should be clear that I am not speaking of those changes of conditions and tactics in which all involved understand the connection to the agreed-upon objectives that mobilized them in the first place. Nor am I referring to those mistakes in evaluating situations that can occur in the process of carrying out concrete actions. These observations apply to the immorality that distorts intentions and against which it is indispensable to be alert. It is important to be attentive to ourselves as activists, and also to explain this to others so they understand beforehand that if they break their commitments this will leave our hands as free as theirs.

There is, of course, a whole range of clever tricks for using other people, and there is no way to catalogue them all. Nor will we become "moral censors," because it is clear that behind this attitude lies a repressive form of consciousness. The objective of such people is to sabotage any action they do not control, immobilizing their companions in struggle with mutual mistrust. And when they smuggle in as contraband from another field supposed values by which they judge our actions, it is good to remember that it is their "morality" that is in question, and that it is not the same as ours. Why, then, would such people choose to be with us?

Finally, it is important to be aware of a less-than-honest gradualism that is used to manipulate situations until in reality they come to oppose their stated objectives. It is in this position that we find all those who accompany us with motives different from those they express. Their mental direction is twisted from the beginning and awaits only the opportunity to manifest itself. In the meantime, they gradually expand their use of codes that, whether overtly or covertly, embody a system of double-speak. This attitude is almost always found among those people who, in the name of some militant organization, disorient activists of good faith, while at the same time they endeavor to make responsibility for their abuses fall on the shoulders of authentic militants.

It is not my intention here to dwell on the familiar "internal problems" that affect every human organization, but it does seem useful to mention the opportunistic root that underlies this

behavior, which involves introducing a mobilizing image of the future, gaining for oneself an immediate image of success.

7. The Kingdom of the Secondary

Present circumstances are such that accusers of every stripe and description adopt a prosecutorial tone and demand explanations from us, acting as though it is we who must prove our innocence to them. What is noteworthy is that their basic tactic lies in exalting all that is secondary, and as a consequence obscuring the primary questions.

This attitude recalls the practice of democracy within companies. Employees may discuss, for example, whether the desks in the office should be nearer to or farther from the windows and whether the office should be furnished with flowers or painted in pleasant colors, none of which is in itself bad. Then they vote, and the majority decides the fate of the furniture and the color of the paint, and this is also not in itself bad. But when it comes time to discuss and propose taking a vote on questions of management and operation, a terrified silence falls… and instantly any idea of democracy is frozen, because in reality we are dwelling in the *kingdom of the secondary*.

Nothing different can be expected from the "prosecutors" of the system. Suddenly some journalist will take on that role—making a preference some of us may have for certain types of food, for example, seem somehow suspicious, or demanding that we "take a stand" on today's burning questions of sports, astrology, and the catechism. Of course, they are never lacking for some clumsy accusation to which it is assumed we must respond, and in superficially setting the context they bandy about words charged with double meanings as they manipulate contradictory images.

What is important to remember is that those who choose to locate themselves in a faction opposed to us have every right to have us explain to them why they are in no condition to judge us and why we, on the other hand, are fully justified in judging them. They need to realize that it is they who must defend their position against our objections. Of course, whether this can actually take place in any given instance depends on certain conditions being present and the individual skill of the contenders, but it is always exasperating to see people who have every right to take the initiative bow their heads before such incoherence.

It is pathetic, too, to watch various leaders on the television screen as they mouth their witticisms and dance like trained bears with the host of the program, or to see them submitting to every sort of humiliation just to make the front pages. Yet as they watch these wonderful examples, many well-intentioned people fail to realize the extent to which the message they are viewing has been deformed or diluted by the time the mass media release it to the public at large.

These comments have focused on facets of the kingdom of the secondary that operate by displacing attention from the fundamental issues, with the result that what reaches the public—supposedly to enlighten them—is really disinformation. Curiously, a great many progressive people are taken in by this trap, failing to understand very clearly just how their receiving this abundance of apparent "news" in practice leaves them more bewildered than accurately informed.

Finally, this is no time to let languish in the camp of the opposition some positions that in reality we need to defend. Were we to abandon these positions, anyone could reduce our position to mere frivolity simply by affirming that he, too, is for example a "humanist" because he is concerned about what is human; that he is "non-violent" because he deplores war; that he is

against discrimination because he has a black friend or a communist friend; that he is an environmentalist because he agrees that we need to protect seals and trees. If pressed, however, such people will be incapable of backing up in any depth the superficial things they say—and the mask will slip, showing their real face, which is anti-humanist, violent, discriminatory, and predatory.

While the previous commentaries on these expressions of the kingdom of the secondary do not really contribute anything new, it is nonetheless worthwhile from time to time to alert those naive activists who, in trying to communicate their ideas, have yet to realize just how strange is this kingdom of the secondary in which they have been interned.

I hope that you will be able to overlook any discomfort experienced on reading a letter perhaps so little related to your own problems and interests, and I trust that in the next letter we will be able to go on to more pleasant things.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

June 4, 1992

Sixth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

In further correspondence, certain readers of these letters have continued their critiques, demanding greater definition of social and political action as well as the prospects for such efforts to transform the present state of affairs. In these circumstances I could simply confine myself to restating what is found at the beginning of the first letter: “For some time now I have been receiving correspondence from various countries requesting that I explain or elaborate on certain of the subjects addressed in my books. For the most part what they have sought are explanations about such concrete issues as violence, politics, the economy, the environment, as well as social and interpersonal relationships. As you can see, these concerns are many and varied, and it is clear that the answers will have to come from specialists in these fields, which of course I am not.”

Although commentaries on these topics have been offered in subsequent letters, it seems that these have not yet managed to satisfy their requests. And this leaves us with a difficulty, for how am I to respond to questions of such broad scope in a writing the length and nature of a letter?

As you know, I participate in a current of opinion, in a movement that during three decades of activity has given rise to numerous institutions and has confronted dictatorships and injustices of every stripe. The efforts of those in this movement have been met with a varied mixture of disinformation, defamation, and deliberate silence. Yet despite these difficulties, this movement has spread around the world, while preserving both its financial and its ideological independence. Had it yielded to expediency, engaging in the usual sordid short-term speculation, it would doubtless have received recognition and press. But this would only have finally consecrated the triumph of the absurd and the victory of everything against which it has struggled.

In its history, the blood of those who participate in this movement has been shed. They have faced imprisonment, deportation, and barriers of every kind. And it is necessary to remember this. In this sense our movement has always felt a close kinship as a tributary of historical humanism, which placed such emphasis on freedom of conscience in the struggle against all obscurantism and in defense of the highest human values. But our movement has also produced works and studies sufficient to provide responses for this era, in which events have finally precipitated a profound crisis. And I will appeal to these works and studies in order to set forth, within the limits of this letter, the fundamental themes and proposals of contemporary humanists.

Statement of the Humanist Movement

Humanists are women and men of this century, of this time. They recognize the achievements of humanism throughout history, and find inspiration in the contributions of many cultures, not only those that today occupy center stage. They are also men and women who recognize that this century and this millennium are drawing to a close, and their project is a new world. Humanists feel that their history is very long and that their future will be even longer. As optimists who believe in freedom and social progress, they fix their gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the general crisis of today.

Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a *universal human nation*. While understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate surroundings. Humanists seek not a uniform world but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and in creativity.

Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its place. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

But a wall has arisen between humanist aspirations and the realities of today's world. The time has come to tear down that wall. To do this, all humanists of the world must unite.

I. Global Capital

This is the great universal truth: Money is everything. Money is government, money is law, money is power. Money is basically sustenance, but more than this it is art, it is philosophy, it is religion. Nothing is done without money, nothing is possible without money. There are no personal relationships without money, there is no intimacy without money. Even peaceful solitude depends on money.

But our relationship with this "universal truth" is contradictory. Most people do not like this state of affairs. And so we find ourselves subject to the tyranny of money—a tyranny that is not abstract, for it has a name, representatives, agents, and well-established procedures.

Today, we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how the surviving economic forms will accommodate to the new dictates of international finance capital. Nothing escapes, as capital worldwide continues to concentrate in ever fewer hands—until even the nation state depends for its survival on credit and loans. All must beg for investment and provide guarantees that give the banking system the ultimate say in decisions. The time is fast approaching when even companies themselves, when every rural area as well as every city, will all be the undisputed property of the banking system. The time of the parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity that once joined people together are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of isolated human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to each other despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity, through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity, through its control of the means of communication and information.

Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our human resources. They deplete irreplaceable natural resources and act with growing disregard for the human being. And just as they have drained everything from companies, industries, and whole governments, so have they deprived even science of its meaning—reducing it to technologies used to generate poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

Humanists do not overstate their case when they contend that the world is now technologically capable of swiftly resolving the problems in employment, food, health care, housing, and education that exist today across vast regions of the planet. If this possibility is not being realized, it is simply because it is prevented by the monstrous speculation of big capital.

By now big capital has exhausted the stage of market economies, and has begun to discipline society to accept the chaos it has itself produced. Yet in the presence of this growing irrationality, it is not the voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition. Rather, it is the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism that are on the rise. And if groups and whole regions are increasingly guided by this new irrationalism, then the space for constructive action by progressive forces will diminish day by day.

On the other hand, millions of working people have already come to recognize that the centralized state is as much a sham as capitalist democracy. And just as working people are standing up against corrupt union bosses, more than ever citizens are questioning their governments and political parties. But it is necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise stagnate and remain nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. For something new to happen, a dialogue about the fundamental factors of our economy must begin in the heart of the community.

For humanists, labor and capital are the principal factors in economic production, while speculation and usury are extraneous. In the present economic circumstances, humanists struggle to totally transform the absurd relationship that has existed between these factors. Until now we have been told that capital receives the profits while workers receive wages, an inequity that has always been justified by the “risk” that capital assumes in investing—as though working people do not risk both their present and their future amid the uncertainties of unemployment and economic crisis.

Another factor in play is management and decision-making in the operation of each company. Earnings not set aside for reinvestment in the enterprise, not used for expansion or diversification, are increasingly diverted into financial speculation, as are profits not used to create new sources of work.

The struggle of working people must therefore be to require maximum productive return from capital. But this cannot happen unless management and directorships are cooperatively shared. How else will it be possible to avoid massive layoffs, business closures, and even the loss of entire industries? For the greatest harm comes from under-investment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced acquisition of debt, and capital flight—not from profits realized through increased productivity. And if some persist in calling for workers to take possession of the means of production following nineteenth-century teachings, they will have to seriously consider the recent failures of real socialism.

As for the argument that treating capital the same way work is treated will only speed its flight to more advantageous areas, it must be pointed out that this cannot go on much longer because the irrationality of the present economic system is leading to saturation and crisis worldwide. Moreover, this argument, apart from embracing a radical immorality, ignores the

historical process in which capital is steadily being transferred to the banking system. As a result, employers and business people are being reduced to the status of employees, stripped of decision-making power in a lengthening chain of command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the recession continues to deepen, these same business people will begin to consider these points more seriously.

Humanists feel the need to act not only on employment issues, but also politically to prevent the State from being solely an instrument of international capital, to ensure a just relationship among the factors of production, and to restore to society its stolen autonomy.

II. Real Democracy Versus Formal Democracy

The edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its foundations—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have been eroded.

The theoretical separation of powers has become nonsense. Even a cursory examination of the practices surrounding the origin and composition of the different powers reveals the intimate relationships that link them to each other. And things could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of one same system. In nation after nation we see one branch gaining supremacy over the others, functions being usurped, corruption and irregularities surfacing—all corresponding to the changing global economic and political situation of each country.

As for representative government, since the extension of universal suffrage people have believed that only a single act is involved when they elect their representative and their representative carries out the mandate received. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first in which the many elect the few, and a second in which those few betray the many, representing interests foreign to the mandate they received. And this corruption is fed within the political parties, now reduced to little more than a handful of leaders who are totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, powerful interests finance candidates and then dictate the policies they must follow. This state of affairs reveals a profound crisis in the contemporary conception and implementation of representative democracy.

Humanists struggle to transform the practice of representative government, giving the highest priority to consulting the people directly through referenda, plebiscites, and direct election of candidates. However, in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, or rather to political maneuvering and financial restrictions that prevent them from even reaching the ballot and the free expression of the will of the people.

Every constitution or law that prevents the full possibility of every citizen to elect and to be elected makes a mockery of real democracy, which is above all such legal restrictions. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, during elections the news media must be placed at the service of the people, providing all candidates with exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the people.

To address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, there is also a need to enact *laws of political responsibility* that will subject such officials to censure, revocation of powers, recall from office, and loss of immunity. The current alternative, under which parties or individuals who do not fulfill their campaign promises risk defeat in future elections, in practice does not hinder in the least the politicians' second act—betraying the people they represent.

As for directly consulting the people on the most urgent issues, every day the possibilities to do so increase through the use of technology. This does not mean simply giving greater importance to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys. What it does mean is to facilitate real participation and direct voting by means of today's advanced computational and communications technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must be provided with the protections that correspond to their right to representation, as well as all measures needed to advance in practice their full inclusion, participation, and development.

Today, minorities the world over who are the targets of xenophobia and discrimination make anguished pleas for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, leading the struggle to overcome such neo-fascism, whether overt or covert. In short, to struggle for the rights of minorities is to struggle for the rights of all human beings.

Under the coercion of centralized states—today no more than the unfeeling instruments of big capital—many countries with diverse populations subject entire provinces, regions, or autonomous groups to this same kind of discrimination. This must end through the adoption of federal forms of organization, through which real political power will return to the hands of these historical and cultural entities.

In sum, to give highest priority to the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and decentralization of the apparatus of the State, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new kind of society—a flexible society constantly changing in harmony with the changing needs of the people, who are now suffocated more each day by their dependence on an inhuman system.

III. The Humanist Position

Humanist action does not draw its inspiration from imaginative theories about God, nature, society, or history. Rather, it begins with life's necessities, which consist most elementally of avoiding pain and moving toward pleasure. Yet human life entails the additional need to foresee future necessities, based on past experience and the intention to improve the present situation.

Human experience is not simply the product of natural physiological accumulation or selection, as happens in all species. It is social experience and personal experience directed toward overcoming pain in the present and avoiding it in the future. Human work, accumulated in the productions of society, is passed on and transformed from one generation to the next in a continuous struggle to improve the existing or natural conditions, even those of the human body itself. Human beings must therefore be defined as historical beings whose mode of social behavior is capable of transforming both the world and their own nature.

Each time that individuals or human groups violently impose themselves on others, they succeed in detaining history, turning their victims into "natural" objects. Nature does not have intentions, and thus to negate the freedom and intentions of others is to convert them into natural objects without intentions, objects to be used.

Human progress in its slow ascent now needs to transform both nature and society, eliminating the violent animal appropriation of some human beings by others. When this happens, we will pass from pre-history into a fully human history. In the meantime, we can begin with no other central value than the human being, fully realized and completely free. Humanists therefore declare, "Nothing above the human being, and no human being beneath any other."

If God, the State, money, or any other entity is placed as the central value, this subordinates the human being and creates the condition for the subsequent control or sacrifice of other human beings. Humanists have this point very clear. Whether atheists or religious, humanists do not start with their atheism or their faith as the basis for their view of the world and their actions. They start with the human being and the immediate needs of human beings. And if, in their struggle for a better world, they believe they discover an intention that moves history in a progressive direction, they place this faith or this discovery at the service of the human being.

Humanists address the fundamental problem: to know if one wants to live, and to decide on the conditions in which to do so.

All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, ideological, and others—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to humanists. For humanists, every form of discrimination, whether subtle or overt, is something to be denounced.

Humanists are not violent, but above all they are not cowards, and because their actions have meaning they are unafraid of facing violence. Humanists connect their personal lives with the life of society. They do not pose such false dichotomies as viewing their own lives as separate from the lives of those around them, and in this lies their coherence.

These issues, then, mark a clear dividing line between humanism and anti-humanism: humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd. Because humanism is based on freedom of choice, it offers the only valid ethic of the present time. And because humanism believes in intention and freedom, it distinguishes between error and bad faith, between one who is mistaken and one who is a traitor.

IV. From Naive Humanism to Conscious Humanism

It is at the base of society, in the places where people work and where they live, that humanism must convert what are now only simple isolated protests into a conscious force oriented toward transforming the economic structures.

The struggles of spirited activists in labor unions and progressive political parties will become more coherent as they transform the leadership of these entities, giving their organizations a new orientation that, above short-range grievances, gives the highest priority to the basic proposals advocated by humanism.

Vast numbers of students and teachers, already sensitive to injustice, are becoming conscious of their will to change as the general crisis touches them. And certainly, members of the press in contact with so much daily tragedy are today in favorable positions to act in a humanist direction, as are those intellectuals whose creations are at odds with the standards promoted by this inhuman system.

In the face of so much human suffering, many positions and organizations today encourage people to unselfishly help the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. Associations, volunteer groups, and large numbers of individuals are on occasion moved to make positive contributions. Without doubt, one of their contributions is to generate denunciations of these wrongs. However, such groups do not focus their actions on transforming the underlying structures that give rise to the problems. Their approaches are more closely related to humanitarianism than to conscious humanism, although among these efforts are many conscientious protests and actions that can be extended and deepened.

V. The Anti-Humanist Camp

As the people continue to be suffocated by the forces of big capital, incoherent proposals arise that gain strength by exploiting people's discontent, focusing it on various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascism is a profound negation of human values. Similarly, there are certain deviant environmental currents that view nature as more important than human beings. No longer do they preach that an environmental catastrophe is a disaster because it endangers humanity—instead to them the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature.

According to certain of these theories, the human being is somehow contaminated, and thus contaminates nature. It would have been better, they contend, had medicine never succeeded in its fight against disease or in prolonging human life. "Earth first!" some cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from this position to begin discriminating against cultures seen to contaminate or against "impure" foreigners. These currents of thought may be considered anti-humanist because at bottom they hold the human being in contempt, and in keeping with the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so fashionable today, their mentors reflect this self-hatred.

There is, however, a significant segment of society made up of perceptive people who consider themselves environmentalists because they understand the gravity of the abuses that environmentalism exposes and condemns. And if this environmentalism attains the humanist character that corresponds, it will direct the struggle against those who are actually generating the catastrophes—big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely intertwined with the military-industrial complex.

Before worrying about seals, they will concern themselves with overcoming hunger, overcrowding, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal standards of housing and sanitation in many parts of the world. They will focus on the unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in a world that is so technologically advanced, yet still generates serious environmental imbalances in the name of ever more irrational growth.

One need not look far to see how the right wing functions as a political instrument of anti-humanism. Dishonesty and bad faith reach such extremes that some exponents periodically present themselves as representatives of "humanism." Take, for example, those cunning clerics who claim to theorize on the basis of a ridiculous "theocentric humanism." These people, who invented religious wars and inquisitions, who put to death the very founders of western humanism, are now attempting to appropriate the virtues of their victims. They have recently gone so far as to "forgive the errors" of those historical humanists, and so shameless is their semantic banditry that these representatives of anti-humanism even try to cloak themselves with the term "humanist."

It would of course be impossible to list the full range of resources, tools, instruments, forms, and expressions that anti-humanism has at its disposal. But having shed light on some of their more deceptive practices should help unsuspecting humanists and those newly realizing they are humanists as they re-think their ideas and the significance of their social practice.

VI. Humanist Action Fronts

With the intention of becoming a broad-based social movement, the vital force of humanism is organizing action fronts in the workplace, neighborhoods, unions, and among social action, political, environmental, and cultural organizations. Such collective action makes it possible for

varied progressive forces, groups, and individuals to have greater presence and influence, without losing their own identities or special characteristics. The objective of this movement is to promote a union of forces increasingly able to influence broad strata of the population, orienting the current social transformation.

Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organization in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

This Statement of the Humanist Movement gives greater definition of certain aspects of contemporary humanism, and in the next letter we will go on to consider other matters.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

April 5, 1993

Seventh Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

This letter will speak of social revolution. But how is this possible, since certain arbiters of opinion have already explained that following the collapse of real socialism the word *revolution* has fallen out of fashion? Perhaps in the back of their minds is the belief that all revolutions prior to 1917 were simply precursors to the "real" revolution. And if the real revolution has failed, clearly this is a subject that may no longer be discussed.

As is their custom, these right-thinking people continue to exercise ideological censorship, assuming the prerogative of conferring or denying legitimacy on words and fashions. The views of these bureaucrats of the spirit (or more precisely, of the media) continue to be diametrically opposed to ours: Previously such people believed the Soviet monolith to be eternal, while today they view the triumph of capitalism as an unalterable reality. They take it for granted that the substance of any revolution must involve bloodshed, accompanied by an indispensable backdrop of marches, gestures, fiery speeches, and banners waving in the breeze.

Hollywood cinematography and Pierre Cardin fashions were constantly present in their formative landscapes, so that today when they consider Islam, for example, they think of women's dress, which causes them much concern. And when they speak of Japan, as soon as they have discussed the economic plan they can hardly wait to express their indignation that the kimono has never quite been phased out. If as children they were raised on a diet of books and movies about pirates, later they felt drawn to Katmandu, island vacations, preserving the environment, and "natural" fashions. If instead they relished westerns and action movies, later they viewed progress in terms of a war of competition and revolution in terms of gunpowder.

We are immersed in a world of codes of mass communication in which the formers of public opinion impose their message through newspapers, magazines, radio, and television; a world in which writers of limited intelligence determine which themes may even be discussed; a world in which reasonable people inform us about today's events and explain to us the way things work. The company of those who may express opinion gather daily before the cameras. There in civilized fashion the psychologist, the sociologist, the political consultant, the fashion expert, the journalist who interviewed Khadafy, and the ineffable astrologer hold forth, one after another. And then all of them shout at us in unison: "Revolution? But that's so completely *passé*!" In short, public opinion (that is, published opinion) maintains that everything is improving, despite a few setbacks, and certifies, moreover, the demise of the revolution.

But what body of well-articulated ideas has been presented to discredit the revolutionary process in today's world? To date nothing more serious than talk-show opinions. In the absence of vigorous conceptions that merit rigorous discussion, let us go on at once to matters of substance.

1. Destructive Chaos or Revolution

This series of letters presents a number of commentaries regarding the general situation in which we now live. These descriptions lead to the following dilemma: Either we let ourselves be swept along by the tendency toward a world that is ever more absurd and destructive, or we give events a different direction. Underlying this formulation is the dialectic of freedom versus

determinism, the human search for choice and commitment versus the acceptance of mechanical tendencies and processes with their dehumanizing end.

The continuing concentration of big capital to the point of worldwide collapse would be dehumanizing, as would be the results: a world convulsed by hunger and overflowing with refugees; a world of endless fighting, warfare, chaos, and constant fear; a world of abuse of authority, injustice, and erosion of basic liberties; a world in which new forms of obscurantism will triumph. It would be dehumanizing to go once more round the same circle until some other civilization arises, only to mechanically repeat the same stupid steps again—that is, if this is still possible after the collapse of the first planetary civilization that is now beginning to take shape.

Within this long history, however, one's own life and the life of each generation is so short and so immediate that **one sees the wider destiny of all as a simple extension of one's own destiny, rather than one's own destiny as a particular case of the wider destiny.**

So it is that the lives people live today are far more compelling than any thought of the life that they or their children will live tomorrow. And, of course, for millions of human beings the situation is so urgent that they have no horizon left to consider some hypothetical future that might come to pass.

At this very moment there are already far too many tragedies, and this is more than enough reason to struggle for a profound change in the overall situation. Why, then, do we speak of tomorrow, if the pressing problems of today are so great? Simply, because the image of the future is increasingly manipulated and we are admonished to put up with present circumstances as if this crisis were something insignificant to bear. "Every economic adjustment," their theories go, "has a social cost." "It is regrettable," we are told, "that for all of us to be well off in the future you will have to endure these hard times today." "And when before," they ask, "has there ever been such technology and medical care as the wealthy nations have today?" "Soon," they assure us, "your time will come, too."

And while they put us off, the actions of those who promise progress for all continue to widen the gap that separates the opulent few from the majorities who suffer ever-greater outrages. The prevailing social order locks things into a vicious circle, feeding on itself as it expands into a worldwide system from which no part of the planet is free.

It is also clear, however, that as positions become more radical and unrest grows more widespread, people everywhere are beginning to see through the hollow promises of society's leaders.

Will everything end up, then, in the war of all against all? Will the future be culture against culture, continent against continent, region against region? Will it be ethnic group against ethnic group, neighbor against neighbor, and family member against family member as people flail about without direction like wounded animals trying to shake off their pain? Or instead will we include and welcome all the differences within the direction of world revolution?

What I am trying to express is that **we are facing the alternative of either destructive chaos, or revolution as a direction that goes beyond the differences among those who are oppressed.** I am saying that each day both the global situation and the particular situation of each individual will become more filled with conflict, and it would clearly be suicidal to leave our future in the hands of the same people who have directed this process so far.

No longer do we live in times in which one can simply wipe out all opposition and then the following day proclaim, "Peace reigns in Warsaw." These are not times in which ten percent of the population can do as they please with the other ninety percent.

Yet today the world is becoming a single closed system where, in the absence of a clear direction for change, capital and power simply continue to accumulate at the expense of everything else. The result is that within this closed system one can expect nothing more than a continued mechanical increase in general disorder. And the paradox of closed systems tells us that any attempt to impose order on the growing disorder will only further accelerate the growth of that disorder. The only way out of this predicament is to revolutionize the system, opening it up to the diversity of human needs and aspirations. Proposed in these terms, the theme of revolution takes on more than usual importance, with a scope and ramifications it could not have had in former times.

2. Of What Revolution Are We Speaking?

The previous letter outlined positions regarding the questions of labor versus big capital, real democracy versus formal democracy, decentralization versus centralization, anti-discrimination versus discrimination, and freedom versus oppression.

If at present capital is steadily being transferred to the banking system, if the banking system continues to gain ownership of companies, nations, regions, and the world, then revolution implies that the banking system be transformed so that its services are made available without charging usurious interest.

If a company is constituted so that capital receives the profits while the workers receive salaries or wages, if company management and decision-making rest solely in the hands of capital, then revolution implies that profits be reinvested, diversified, or used to create new sources of employment, and that management and decision-making be shared by labor and capital.

If the regions, provinces, or states within a country have their hands tied by centralized decision-making, then revolution implies restructuring that centralized power into regional entities forming a federal republic, and for those regions to be similarly decentralized in favor of locally based power, from which all electoral representation must derive.

If health and education are provided in an unequal way to the inhabitants of a country, then revolution implies free access to education and health care for everyone, because these are clearly the two highest values of the revolution and must replace wealth and power in the current social paradigm. **Viewing everything in terms of the priorities of education and health care provides the correct framework for dealing with the highly complex economic and technological challenges facing today's society.** It seems that in no other way, certainly not while wealth and power remain the highest values, can a society with evolutionary possibilities be formed.

The central argument employed by capitalism against new proposals is to cast doubt on them by continually asking where the financial resources will come from and how productivity will be increased, implying by this that it is only lending by the banking system and not the work of the people that is the origin of resources. Besides, what is the purpose of productivity if this production simply vanishes at once from the hands of those who produce it?

Nor are we taught anything extraordinary by the model of society that has been in place for some decades in certain parts of the world (and that is now beginning to fall apart). Whether education and health care are really progressing so remarkably in those countries still remains to be seen in light of the growing plagues, which are not only physical but also psycho-social.

If it is part of their education to create an authoritarian, violent, and xenophobic human being, if part of progress in health care is rising alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide, then such a model is obviously not valid. Although as humanists we will continue to admire the well-organized centers of education and the well-equipped hospitals, we will endeavor to ensure that **they are placed at the service of all people without distinction.** However, in regard to the content and meaning of education and healthcare, there are more than ample grounds on which to object to the present system.

This letter speaks of a social revolution that will result in a dramatic change in people's living conditions, of a political revolution that will alter the power structure, and ultimately of a human revolution that will create its own paradigms in replacing today's decadent values. **The social revolution to which humanism aspires will come to pass through gaining the political power necessary to carry out appropriate transformations, but gaining that power is not in itself an objective.** Moreover, violence is not an essential component of this revolution. What good would it be to follow the repugnant practices of imprisoning and executing one's enemies? What would be the difference between this and what oppressors have always done?

India's anti-colonial revolution was brought about by popular pressure and not through violence, and while this revolution remained unfinished due to the limited scope of its ideology, it did demonstrate a new methodology of action and struggle. The revolution that overthrew the Iranian monarchy was also unleashed by popular pressure; a takeover of the centers of political power was not even necessary as these were already "emptied," destructured, until eventually they ceased to function altogether. Then, the intolerance that followed ruined everything.

Thus, revolutions are possible by various means, including electoral victory. But in every case drastic transformations of society's structures must immediately be set in motion—beginning with the establishment of a new legal order that, among other things, will fully exhibit the new social relationships of production, prevent abuses of power, and modify the function of those structures that, although they come from the past, are still capable of being improved.

Today, however, neither the revolutions that are dying nor the new ones being born will progress past the stage of speeches within this stagnating social order. They will not develop beyond the stage of organized mobs if they do not advance in the direction signaled by humanism, that is, toward a system of social relationships whose central value is the human being, and not other values such as "productivity" or "a socialist society," for example.

But to place the human being as the central value implies an idea that is totally distinct from what is generally understood today by the term *human being.* The current models used to characterize the human being are still far removed from the idea and the sensibility necessary to fully grasp the reality of what is human. Still, and it is important to point this out, beyond the confines of today's naive and superficial models there are some signs of a revival of critical intelligence. To mention but one case, the work of G. Petrovich[1] embodies concepts that presage the present development. He defines revolution as "the creation of an essentially distinct mode of being, different from all being that is non-human, anti-human, and not-yet-entirely-human." Petrovich concludes by identifying revolution with the highest form of being, as "being in fullness" and "Being-in-Liberty."

The revolutionary tide already in motion expresses the desperation of the oppressed majorities, and it will not be stopped. But this alone will not be enough, because a suitable direction for this process will not come about solely through the mechanisms of "social practice." **What is imperative at this time, when the human being is so completely circumscribed, is**

to move from the field of necessity to the field of liberty by means of revolution. Future revolutions, if they are to be more than putsches, palace coups, or the simple redress of class, ethnic, or religious grievances, will have to take on an inclusive and transforming character based on what is essentially human. And beyond the changes they will produce in the concrete situations of their countries, their character will be universalist and their objectives globalizing. Thus, when we speak of "world revolution" it is understood that the character and objectives of any humanist revolution or any revolution that becomes humanist, though it may take place in a limited area, will carry it beyond itself. And every such revolution, no matter how insignificant the location in which it takes place, will involve the essentiality of every human being. World revolution cannot simply be proposed in terms of "success," but rather in its real and humanizing dimension. Moreover, the new kind of revolutionary who corresponds to this new type of revolution becomes, by essence and by activity, a humanizer of the world.

3. Action Fronts in the Revolutionary Process

Next I would like to expand on certain practical considerations related to creating the conditions necessary for a social force of sufficient unity, organization, and growth to position itself in the direction of a revolutionary process.

Today, the old thesis of forming common fronts among progressive forces based on minimum points of agreement has in practice become only "clusters" of partisan dissidents clinging together without connection to the wider society. The result is that contradictions accumulate among their leaders, who are reduced merely to pursuing media coverage and political self-promotion. During times when a well-funded political party could achieve hegemony over many fragments, it was viable to propose forming common fronts for electoral campaigns. Today, despite the fact that the situation has changed drastically, the traditional left continues to follow these same procedures as if nothing were different.

It is necessary to review the function of the political party in today's world and to ask whether parties are structures that are still capable of setting revolution in motion. For if the prevailing system has completed the process of swallowing political parties, reducing them to hollow shells in an artificial activity controlled by big capital and the banking system, then a party of mere superstructure without any human base could achieve formal power (but not real power) without in the process necessarily introducing even minimal fundamental change.

For now, political action requires creating a party that attains electoral representation at various levels. It must be clear from the outset, however, that the objective of such representation is to direct the conflict to the heart of established power. In that context, a party member who becomes a representative of the people is not so much a public functionary as a reference who calls attention to the contradictions of the system, organizing the struggle in the direction of the revolution. In other words, party or institutional political work is understood here as the expression of a broader social phenomenon that has its own dynamic. In this way, while a party may reach its greatest level of activity during elections, the different action fronts that from time to time form its base will use these same elections to call public attention to social conflicts and to broaden their organizations.

Here we find important differences from the traditional conception of a party. Indeed, until only a few decades ago the party was thought of as the vanguard of the struggle, bringing together different action fronts. The proposal here is just the opposite: Action fronts organize

and develop the base of a social movement, while a party becomes the institutional expression of this movement. In turn, such a party must create conditions so that other progressive political forces will be fully included; it cannot expect them to lose their identity and simply blend in. This party must reach beyond its own identity and form a broad-based front with other forces to include the many progressive factors that are now so fragmented. But this will amount to nothing more than agreements among leadership unless the party has a real base that orients the process.

This proposal is not, however, reversible; that is, this party cannot form part of a front organized by other entities that are merely superstructures. Such a party, whose real strength comes from the base organization, can form a political front with other forces that agree with certain basic conditions established by this party.

Let us now consider the various types of action fronts. Such fronts need to work in the administrative base of each country, focusing on city and local government. The idea is to develop in the workplaces and neighborhoods of the selected areas **common fronts committed to actions that address real conflicts that have been correctly prioritized. This last point means that working to redress short-term grievances is meaningless if that struggle does not result in organizational growth and positioning for subsequent steps.** It is important to make it clear to everyone just how each conflict is directly related to their standard of living, to health care, and to education (and as their understanding deepens, workers in the fields of health and education will tend to become direct supporters and later form part of the cadres necessary for directly organizing the social base).

The same phenomena that we find taking place with political parties in the present system are also occurring in unions and labor organizations. Thus, the proposal is not to win control of labor organizations or unions but to bring together the workers who will as a consequence replace the former leadership's control. In this area it is important to encourage all systems of direct elections as well as any conventions and assemblies that commit the leadership—requiring either that they take positions on concrete conflicts that provide meaningful responses to the demands of the base or be bypassed. And certainly, labor action fronts must design their tactics with the objective of growth in the organization of the social base.

Finally, setting in motion social and cultural institutions that act from the base is of the utmost importance, because it allows communities that suffer discrimination or persecution to come together in a context of respect for human rights, finding a common direction notwithstanding their particular differences. The thesis that all ethnic groups, collectivities, and human groupings subject to discrimination must become strong by themselves so as to confront the abuse they are subject to exhibits a significant lack of understanding of the predicament we are all in. It is a position that stems from the notion that "mixing" with foreign elements will cause a loss of identity, when in reality it is precisely their isolated position that leaves them exposed and easily eradicated, or else left in a situation where they become so radical that their persecutors can justify direct action against them. **The best guarantee of survival for minorities suffering discrimination is for them to form part of an action front with others to channel the struggle for their demands in a revolutionary direction.** After all, it is the system taken as a whole that has created the conditions for discrimination, and these conditions will not disappear until that social order is transformed.

4. Revolutionary Process and Revolutionary Direction

It is important to distinguish between revolutionary process and revolutionary direction. From our point of view, **a revolutionary process is understood as a set of mechanical conditions that are generated as the system develops.** In this sense, such development creates factors of disorder that are ultimately either supplanted, assert themselves, or end up causing a breakdown of the entire scheme of things. According to this analysis, the globalization toward which the world is now proceeding is generating acute factors of disorder in the overall development of the system. And, as we have discussed in previous letters on more than one occasion, this process is independent of the voluntary action of groups or individuals. The problem that now arises is what, precisely, will be the future of this system, given that it is mechanically proceeding to revolutionize itself without the intervention of any progressive orientation whatsoever.

The orientation at issue depends on human intention and escapes the determinism of the conditions produced by the present system. I have already presented on previous occasions my position on the non-passivity of the human consciousness, its essential quality of not being simply a reflection of objective conditions, its capacity to oppose such conditions and to devise a future situation different from life at present [See “Fourth Letter to My Friends,” sections 3 and 4, and *Contributions to Thought*].

It is within this mode of liberty, within conditions, that we interpret the revolutionary direction.

It is through the exercise of violence that a minority of the wealthy and powerful impose their conditions on the social whole, organizing an order—an inertial system—that simply continues its mechanical development. Viewed in this way, the modes of production as well as the resulting social relationships, the legal order, the dominant ideologies that regulate and justify this order, and the apparatus of the State or Parastate by means of which the whole of society is controlled, are all revealed as instruments that serve the interests and intentions of the minority holding power. But the system continues to develop mechanically beyond the intentions of the powerful few as they endeavor to concentrate ever more the factors of power and control, in the process only further accelerating the process of the prevailing system, which increasingly escapes their control.

The resulting disorder will clash with the established order, provoking the powers that be to apply proportionately greater resources for their protection. In critical periods, the whole of society will be disciplined with all the violence that the system has at its disposal. And this leads to the maximum recourse available: the armed forces. Is it entirely certain, however, that the armed forces will continue to respond in the traditional way during times such as these when the whole system is heading toward a global collapse? If they do not, the momentous shift in the direction of current events that could result is a subject that merits further discussion.

Even a brief examination of the final stages of the civilizations that have preceded the present one shows that armies have indeed risen up against the established powers, and have as well become divided by the civil wars for which the seeds were already present. But because the system was unable by itself to introduce a new direction into this situation, it simply proceeded along its catastrophic course. Will the world civilization now taking shape suffer the same fate? In the next letter we will have to further consider the case of the armed forces.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,
Silo
August 7, 1993

Eighth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

As indicated in the previous letter, the present letter will focus on points related to the armed forces. The interest of this writing will center, of course, on the relationships among the armed forces, political power, and society, and will be based on the paper I presented three months ago in Moscow under the title “The Need for a Humanist Position in the Contemporary Armed Forces.”[2] This letter will depart from the concepts in the original paper in treating the position of the military in the revolutionary process, a topic that will allow further development of ideas outlined in previous letters.

1. The Need to Redefine the Role of the Armed Forces

Today the armed forces are endeavoring to define what their new role will be in a process that began with the proposals for progressive proportional disarmament initiated by the Soviet Union toward the end of the 1980s. The diminishing tensions between the superpowers led to a reversal in the concept of defense for the major powers. Meanwhile, the gradual replacement of military-political blocs, in particular the Warsaw Pact, by a system of relatively cooperative relationships has unleashed centrifugal forces that have given rise to fresh conflicts in various parts of the globe. Certainly, at the height of the cold war limited wars were frequent and often prolonged, but the current character of these conflicts has changed, and now threatens to spill over from the Balkans into the Muslim world and other areas of Asia and Africa.

Given the secessionist tendencies inside many countries, the border disputes that previously occupied the armed forces of adjoining nations are today taking a different direction. Economic, ethnic, and linguistic differences are leading to changes in borders long thought unalterable at the same time that large-scale migrations are taking place. Human groups are being uprooted as they flee desperate situations; others try to hold back or expel different groups from certain areas.

These and other phenomena reveal profound changes, particularly in the structure and conception of the State. At the same time that we are witnessing a process of economic and political regionalization, we are also seeing growing discord within many countries as they move toward this regionalization. **It is as if the nation state, designed two hundred years ago, is no longer able to withstand the blows from above by multinational interests and from below by the forces of secession.** Increasingly dependent, increasingly tied to the regional economy, increasingly pitted against other regions in economic warfare, the State is undergoing a crisis of unprecedented proportions as it struggles to maintain control of the changing situation in which it finds itself.

Existing civil and commercial laws and regulations have become obsolete, and constitutional documents are being amended to open the way for the ever-greater worldwide movement of capital and financial resources. Even penal codes are changing—today a citizen may be seized for a crime that has been tried in another country under foreign laws by judges of a different nationality. The traditional concept of national sovereignty, then, has been noticeably weakened.

The entire legal-political apparatus of the State, its institutions, and those people directly or indirectly in its service, are all experiencing the effects of this general crisis.

The armed forces, long assigned the role of protector of the general sovereignty and security, are also suffering these problems. As education, health care, and the means of communication are privatized along with goods and services, natural resources, and even significant areas of public safety, this continues to erode the importance of the traditional State. It follows that if the administration and resources of a nation are removed from the sphere of public control, that the legal and judicial system will follow suit, reducing the armed forces to the role of a mere private militia assigned to defending only parochial or multinational financial interests. And indeed these trends have recently intensified in many countries.

2. Continuing Factors of Aggression in This Period of Reduced Tensions

Among the powers that have declared the cold war at an end, external aggression has yet to disappear, however. Violations of air and maritime space continue, as do provocations against distant nations, fresh incursions and base installations, new military pacts, and even foreign wars and occupations to control shipping lanes or areas with abundant natural resources.

The clear record established in the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; in the Suez, Berlin, and Cuban crises; and in the invasions of Grenada, Tripoli, and Panama, has shown the world that more powerful nations frequently direct disproportionate military action against defenseless nations, a record that weighs heavily at the time of disarmament talks.

This type of action is particularly grave when, as in the case of the Gulf War, it takes place on the flanks of important powers that could interpret such acts as threats to their own security. These excesses also have harmful secondary effects when they strengthen certain sectors within those powers, allowing them to criticize their governments as incapable of stopping such encroachments. And all of this could compromise the climate of international peace that is now so vital.

3. Internal Security and Military Restructuring

Regarding internal security, it is important to note two problems that are visible on the horizon: social explosions and terrorism.

If unemployment and recession continue to rise in the industrialized nations, it is possible these areas will be the scene of growing unrest and upheavals, reversing to a degree the picture of previous decades in which conflicts arose on the periphery of these centers, which were nonetheless able to continue their expansion without experiencing undue shocks. Today, however, events such as the recent riots in Los Angeles could spread beyond one city and even to other countries.

Secondly, the phenomenon of terrorism presents a danger of some magnitude, considering the firepower to which these relatively specialized individuals and groups now have access. This threat could take the form of high explosives and even nuclear devices or chemical and biological weapons, all of which continue to become less expensive and easier to produce.

In the unstable panorama of today's world, the concerns of the armed forces are many and varied. In addition to the strategic and political problems they face, there are internal issues of restructuring, large-scale troop reductions, recruiting and training methods, replacement of

equipment, technological modernization and, of primary importance, declining budgets. However, while the armed forces must thoroughly comprehend these factors in the context of their own sphere of activity, it must be added that none of these problems can be fully resolved until the primary function that the military is to fulfill in society and the world is made clear. It is, after all, political power that gives orientation to the armed forces, which must act in accordance with that orientation.

4. A Review of the Concepts of Sovereignty and Security

In the traditional conception of these issues, the armed forces are assigned the function of safeguarding the nation's sovereignty and security and granted the authority to use force in accordance with the mandate of the duly constituted powers. In this way, the State's monopoly on violence is transferred to the military services.

But this brings us to a key point in the discussion of what should be understood by the terms *sovereignty* and *security*. If a nation's sovereignty and security or, in more modern terms, its "progress" are said to require extraterritorial sources of raw materials, indisputable rights of maritime passage to protect the flow of commerce, and the control of strategic points or the occupation of foreign territory with these same objectives, then what we are faced with is the theory and practice of colonialism or neocolonialism.

The function of the military during colonial times consisted principally of facilitating the interests of the crowns of the period, and later on the interests of the private companies that obtained special concessions of political power in exchange for suitable compensation. The illegality of that system was justified by the supposed barbarism of the subjugated peoples, who were characterized as incapable of adequately governing themselves. The ideology corresponding to this stage affirmed colonialism as a "civilizing" system *par excellence.*

During the age of Napoleonic imperialism, the function of the army, which also held political power, consisted of expanding the borders with the declared objective of redeeming through military action peoples who were oppressed by tyrannies, and installing a legal and administrative system enshrining liberty, equality, and fraternity in its legal codes. The corresponding ideology justified this imperial expansion by the claim of "necessity" on the part of a power constituted by the democratic revolution against illegal monarchies that were based on inequality and that moreover formed a united front to suppress the revolution.

More recently, and following the teachings of Clausewitz, war has been understood as a simple extension of politics, and the State as promoter of these policies is considered the governing apparatus of a society that lies within certain geographical limits. Starting with this premise, geo-politicians have reached certain definitions they now hold dear in which borders are viewed as the "skin of the State," and in this organic-logical conception, the "skin" contracts or expands in accordance with the vital energy of the nation, and must thus expand as the progress of the community demands greater "living space" given its population density or economic strength.

From this perspective, the function of the military is to acquire space according to the demands of the policy of security and sovereignty, which is given primacy over the needs of neighboring countries. In this case, the dominant ideology proclaims that the differences in the needs experienced by various collectivities are related to "inherent" characteristics. This zoological vision of the struggle for the survival of the fittest recalls Darwinian conceptions, here illegitimately carried into the sphere of political and military practice.

5. The Legality and Limits of Established Power

Today we frequently hear reference made to the three conceptions used above to illustrate both how the military responds to political power and how it is framed within the various positions that political powers define at any given time as security and sovereignty. And if the function of the military is to serve the State in matters of security and sovereignty, and if the conception of these two factors varies from government to government, then the armed forces will have to abide by these changing directions.

Are there any limits or exceptions to this? **Two clear exceptions can be seen: (1) when political power has been illegally constituted and civil recourse to rectify this irregular situation has been exhausted; and (2) when political power has been legally constituted but in its exercise has become illegal, and civil recourse to rectify this anomalous situation has been exhausted.**

In both cases the armed forces have the duty to reestablish the legality that has been interrupted, which is equivalent to carrying forward the actions civil means were unable to bring about. In such circumstances the military's duty is clearly to the law and not to the established power.

This does not mean, however, promoting a state that is dependent on the military; rather, the focus is on restoring the legality previously interrupted by an established power of criminal origin or one that has become criminal.

The questions that must now be asked are: where does legality originate, and what are its characteristics? As humanists our view is that legality flows from the people, as it is the people who give rise to a particular type of State and fundamental laws, to which the citizenry must then submit. And in the extreme case that the people should decide to amend the type of State and type of laws, it is incumbent upon the State and the legal system to carry this out, because there is no State structure or legal system whose existence can be placed above such a decision by the people. This point leads to a consideration of the revolutionary act, which will be treated further on.

6. Military Responsibility to Political Power

It should be emphasized that the military services need to be made up of citizens who recognize and carry out their responsibilities to the legality of the established power. And if the established power is functioning based on a democracy in which the will of the majority is respected through the election and replacement of representatives of the people, in which minorities are respected in accordance with established law, and in which there is respect for the separation and independence of powers, then the armed forces need not pass judgment on the correctness or errors of their government.

If, however, an illegal regime is imposed, then the armed forces cannot simply support it by mechanically invoking "obligatory obedience" to this regime. And in the case of international conflicts, the armed forces cannot carry out genocide following the orders of a political power made feverish by abnormal circumstances. For if human rights are not placed above every other right, it is not possible to understand why either social organization or the State exist. In the same way, no one can claim to be "just following orders" when it comes to assassination, torture, or degradation of the human being. If the trials following World War II taught us

anything, it is that every person in the military has responsibilities as a human being, even in the extreme situation of armed conflict.

At this point it could be asked: Is not the military an institution whose training, discipline, and equipment make it primarily a factor of destruction? I would reply that long ago things were set up as they are today and, independent of the aversion we feel for every form of violence, we cannot now propose the simple disappearance or unilateral disarmament of the military, which would only leave a vacuum that will be filled by other aggressive forces, as was previously noted in relation to the record of attacks carried out against defenseless nations.

The armed forces have an important mission to fulfill in not obstructing the philosophy and practice of proportional progressive disarmament and through inspiring their colleagues in other countries to move in the same direction. They can make it clear that the function of the military in the world today is to avoid both catastrophes and the oppression imposed by illegal governments that do not answer to a popular mandate.

The greatest service, then, that the armed forces can contribute to their country and to all of humanity will be to prevent the existence of war. This proposal, which might seem utopian, is today supported by the strength of events that demonstrate how dangerous and impractical it is for everyone when military power increases, either unilaterally or globally.

Let us now return to the theme of military responsibility through some examples of the opposite. During the period of the cold war, the West repeated two messages: that NATO and other alliances were formed to preserve a way of life threatened by Soviet and on occasion Chinese communism, and that military actions were undertaken in distant lands to protect the “interests” of the Western powers.

In Latin America the military preferred the pretext of the threat of internal subversion to justify their *coups d’état.* The armed forces there failed to answer to political power, trampling all law and every constitution in militarizing practically an entire continent under this so-called “doctrine of national security.” The sequel of death and backwardness left by these dictatorships was bizarrely justified throughout the chain of command by the concept of “obligatory obedience,” holding that under military discipline each level is simply to follow the orders of the next higher level. This way of posing things, reminiscent of Nazi justifications of genocide, must be borne in mind in any discussion of the limits of military discipline.

Our point of view, as already mentioned, is that once the military severs its dependence on political power it then constitutes an irregular force, an armed gang outside the law. This issue is clear, but admits one exception: a military uprising against a political power that has been illegally established or subsequently become seditious. The armed forces cannot invoke “obligatory obedience” to such an illegal power or they become accomplices in this irregularity, just as in other circumstances they cannot engage in a military coup, ignoring their duty to follow the popular mandate. These issues relate to internal order and, similarly, during international conflicts the armed forces cannot attack the civilian population of an enemy nation.

7. Military Restructuring

Regarding military recruitment, our point of view favors replacing compulsory with optional military service, a system that allows superior training of the professional soldier. But this limitation on recruitment will also be accompanied by a significant reduction in the levels of enlisted and officer personnel.

It is clear that a satisfactory restructuring of the military cannot be accomplished without attending to the personal, family, and social problems that will arise in numerous armies that now find themselves oversized for today's world. The change in employment, geographical location, and re-entry into society of these troops will be more harmonious if the military maintains a flexible relationship with them throughout the period required for their readjustment.

The primary factor that must be taken into account in the restructuring taking place today in various parts of the world is the political model of each country involved. Naturally, a unitary political system has characteristics different from those of a federal system or one in which various countries are joining together to form a regional community.

Our point of view favors federal systems open to regional confederations, for which a correctly designed restructuring will require permanent, solid commitments to give continuity to this project. Without a clearly established desire on the part of all the parties to move in this direction, such restructuring will not be possible, because the financial support from each country will be subject to unpredictable political fluctuations. In this case, the federal armed forces would have only a formal existence, and military contingents would be the simple aggregation of separate troops from each community that is part of the federation. Attempting to form a unified command in this situation will present serious problems that will be difficult to resolve. In short, the political power that orients the military must set the guidelines, and in each set of circumstances the armed forces will require very precise and coordinated guidance.

Another important problem in restructuring is related to security forces. The function of security forces, if they are not part of the military, is to maintain internal order and to protect the country's citizens, although habitually they become involved in operations of surveillance and control of the population that are far removed from the objectives for which they were created. In many countries, the organizational chart in which they appear shows them directly connected to political ministries or cabinets of the interior rather than the ministry of war or defense.

The police, in contrast, are understood as public servants formed to follow a legal chain of command that will not be detrimental to the country's inhabitants; they have an accessory character and fall under the jurisdiction of the judicial branch. Often, however, through their character as a public force they carry out operations that can make them appear like military forces in the eyes of the population. It is clear how inappropriate such confusion is, and that it is in the best interest of the armed forces that these distinctions be made clear to all.

Similar things occur with other State organizations such as the intelligence services or other secret bodies, which often overlap and duplicate each other and which also have nothing to do with the military. The military does need an appropriate system of gathering intelligence to operate efficiently, but not one that in any way resembles mechanisms of surveillance and control of the country's citizens, because the military's function has to do with the security of the nation and certainly not with involvement in any ideological approval or censure by the government of the moment.

8. The Military's Position in the Revolutionary Process

It is supposed that in a democracy power flows from the sovereignty of the people. Both the conformation of the State as well as of those organizations that derive from it stem from this same source. Thus, in defending the country's sovereignty and providing security for the country's inhabitants, the military fulfills the function conferred on it by the State.

As we have seen, aberrations can of course occur if the military or some other faction illegally seizes power. And as we have also seen, the extreme case can occur in which the people may decide to change the type of State and type of laws—that is, the entire system. Under these circumstances, it is incumbent on everyone to carry out these changes, because there is no state structure or legal system whose existence can be placed above this decision by the people.

Certainly the fundamental documents of many countries contemplate the possibility that these documents can be modified by popular decision. This is one way that revolutionary change can take place, through which formal democracy will give way to real democracy.

If, however, this possibility is blocked, that constitutes a denial of the source from which all legality flows. In these circumstances, and only after having exhausted all civil recourse, it is the obligation of the military to carry out this will to change by removing the faction that is currently installed, now illegally, in power over public life. Through that military intervention society can reach the creation of revolutionary conditions in which the people can put into practice a new type of social organization and a new legal system.

It is hardly necessary to point out the differences between military intervention having the objective of returning to the people the sovereignty that has been stolen from them and the simple military coup that violates the legality previously established by popular mandate. Consistent with these ideas, legality requires that the will of the people be respected even when they propose revolutionary changes. Why shouldn't the majority express their desire to change these basic structures and, what is more, why shouldn't minorities have the opportunity to work politically to bring about revolutionary change in society? **Denying the will to revolutionary change through repression and violence seriously compromises the legality of the current system of today's formal democracies.**

It will be observed that this letter has not touched on matters relating to military strategy or doctrine or on questions of military technology and organization. This could not have been otherwise, for **we have applied a humanist point of view to the armed forces in relation to political power and society.**

The men and women of the military still have before them the enormous task, both theoretical and practical, of adapting their framework and organization to this special time in which we find our world. The views of society, and the genuine interest of the armed forces (although they are not specialists) to know those views, is a matter of fundamental importance. At the same time, vigorous relationships between members of the military from different countries, accompanied by frank and civilized discussions, form important steps toward recognizing the plurality of points of view. The attitude in some military forces that keeps them isolated from others, and their unresponsiveness in the face of the people's demands, correspond to an earlier period in which human and tangible interchange were restricted. Today the world has changed for everyone, including the armed forces.

9. Considerations on the Military and Revolution

Two widely asserted opinions are today of special interest: The first declares that the time of revolutions has passed and the second that military influence in decision-making is gradually declining. It is also supposed that only in certain backward or poorly organized countries do such hindrances from the past still pose a threat. It is further held that as the system of

international relations takes on an ever more solid character, it will make its weight felt until all the old factors of disorder are brought under control.

On the question of revolutions, as already noted, our point of view is diametrically opposed to the above notions. Whether concerted action by "civilized" nations will impose a new world order in which military influence will play no part is highly debatable. **It should be noted that it is precisely in those nations and regions that are taking on an imperial character that both revolutions and military influence are increasingly making their presence felt. Sooner or later, as the forces of money become ever more concentrated, they will confront the majority, and in this situation *bank* and *military* will end up being antithetical terms.**

As contemporary humanists, we find ourselves, then, at the opposite pole of the interpretation of historical processes from those who support the prevailing system. Only the times near at hand will tell which perception of events is correct, events that some always seem to find (in the tradition of recent years) "incredible." With their way of looking at things, what will they say when the things described here do come to pass? Probably that humanity has gone backwards, returned to the past, or in more everyday terms that "the world has fallen apart."

We believe that phenomena such as the spread of irrationality, the rise of ever stronger religiosity, and many other related phenomena do not belong to the past, but correspond to a new stage that we will have to face with all the intellectual courage and human commitment of which we are capable. It will not work to go on claiming that society can best develop by staying the present course. What is important here is to comprehend that the conditions under which we are living are leading us directly toward the collapse of an entire system, a system that some consider defective but still "perfectible." Today there is no longer any such perfectible system. On the contrary, every day this system reaches new heights in all the forms of inhumanity it has been amassing over the course of so many years.

If someone should criticize these assertions as lacking any basis, it is entirely within their rights to present a different position that is coherent. If they feel that our position is pessimistic, as humanists we affirm that the new direction toward a humanized world will prevail over this mechanical negative process. And that new direction will be propelled by the revolution that the vast communities of humanity will finally bring about, those thousands of millions of human beings who are every day denied their destiny.

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

August 10, 1993

Ninth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

Often I receive correspondence in which people ask me what is happening today regarding human rights. I do not myself have the information necessary to provide a full answer to this question. I believe, rather, that the countries who are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights know what is happening, that is, the more than one hundred sixty nations of the world who, on December 10, 1948 or thereafter, indicated by their signatures their acceptance of this declaration, which was prepared under the auspices of the United Nations. All of them understood the issues in question, and all committed themselves to defend the rights proclaimed. Many also signed the Helsinki Accords and sent representatives to subsequent commissions on human rights and the international courts.

1. Violations of Human Rights

In reviewing the daily accounts of current events related to human rights, however, one feels compelled to reformulate this question as follows: What is this hypocritical game that governments are playing in their treatment of human rights? Even a cursory examination of the information that flows from news organizations, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television will provide an answer to this question. As one example, let us consider the Amnesty International report for the most recent year, 1992, and briefly review some of its data.

Along with conspicuous disasters such as the wars in Yugoslavia and Somalia, violations of human rights were found to have increased all over the world. There were prisoners of conscience in 62 countries, institutionalized torture in 110, and political assassinations employed by governments in 45. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina exhibited abuse and slaughter by all sides, perpetrated against tens of thousands of people who were assassinated, tortured, and starved, often solely because of their ethnicity. These same phenomena are also occurring in other places such as Tadzhikistan and Azerbaijan.

Accusations of torture and mistreatment by security forces increased significantly in Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Romania, and Italy. The race of the victims in these cases was often seen to play an important role. Armed opposition groups in the United Kingdom, Spain, and Turkey also committed serious violations of human rights. In the United States 31 people were executed, the highest toll since 1977, the year that the death penalty was re-instituted. In Somalia, thousands of unarmed civilians were killed during this same period.

In 1992 security forces and death squads murdered approximately 4,000 people in Latin America. In Venezuela there were dozens of arrests and executions of political prisoners during the suspension of constitutional guarantees following the attempted coups of February 4 and November 27. In Cuba, approximately 300 persons were kept imprisoned for political reasons, although because international observers from Amnesty International were barred from the country the accuracy of these data could not be confirmed. In Brazil police killed 111 in São Paolo during a prison riot, while in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and other areas of the country hundreds of children and other “undesirables” were murdered. In Peru 139 persons “disappeared,” and security forces carried out 65 extra-judicial executions. Amnesty International also received reports of widespread abuse in Peru’s rural mountain areas, and

approximately 70 persons were sentenced to life imprisonment in irregular judicial proceedings. Armed opposition groups also murdered several dozen people in different regions of that country. In Colombia, repeated reports of human rights violations were denied by presidential advisors on this matter, who attributed such reports to opposition politicians seeking to distort the image of political reality in the country. Notwithstanding these denials, Amnesty International accused the armed forces and paramilitary groups of the extra-judicial executions of no less than 500 persons, while armed opposition groups and drug-trafficking organizations murdered some 200 more.

Amnesty International also reported that the struggle against militant Islamic groups triggered a deterioration of the human rights situation in various Arab countries, including Algeria and Egypt. Torture, lack of due process, political assassinations, “disappearances,” and other major violations of human rights were perpetrated by government agents throughout the Middle East. In Egypt the adoption of new legislation “facilitated” torture of political detainees, and a military court sentenced to death eight Islamic militants, presumed to be members of an armed group, following a process that was deemed unjust. In Algeria as many as 10,000 persons were interned in isolated desert concentration camps without being charged and without due process. In turn, fundamentalist groups were found to be responsible for the murder of civilians and other serious violations of human rights in Algeria and Egypt, as well as in the territories occupied by Israel. Detention without due process was particularly widespread in Syria, but also took place in Israel, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Regarding China, Amnesty International called attention to the number of “prisoners of conscience” and the sentencing of political activists without previous judicial proceedings.

News and information organizations of various leanings have prepared world maps showing dozens of countries dotted with human rights violations and other maps showing mounting death tolls from religious and inter-ethnic warfare. In addition, they highlight areas of starvation where tens of thousands of people have died, either in their homelands or during large-scale migrations.

It should be emphasized that the information outlined above does not by any means exhaust either the theme of human rights or, consequently, the forms of violation of human rights taking place in the world today.

2. Human Rights, Peace, and Humanitarianism as Pretexts for Intervention

Today there is renewed vigor in the discussion of human rights, yet the cast of those who carry this banner has changed. In decades past, progressive movements have worked actively in defense of these principles, which have been established by a consensus of the nations. Of course, even while paying lip service to these rights, many dictatorships have made a mockery of human needs and of personal and collective freedom. Some have announced that as long as citizens did not speak out against the prevailing system they would continue to have access to housing, health care, education, and employment. Logically, these governments said, we should not confuse liberty with license, and “license” is to speak out against the government.

Today it is the right wing in many countries that has raised this standard anew and tries to appear active in defense of human rights and peace, above all in those foreign countries where their own domination is not complete. Taking advantage of certain international mechanisms, they organize forces for intervention capable of reaching any point on the globe with the stated

goal of imposing “peace and justice.” Supporting the faction that is most subordinate to them, they begin by bringing in food and medicine, only to later attack the populace with bullets. Soon, any fifth column will be able to claim that elements in their country are disturbing the peace or that human rights are being trampled, and thus request assistance from these interventionists.

By now, primitive treaties and mutual defense pacts have been perfected into documents that legalize action by “neutral” forces. In this way, the old *Pax Romana* is being revived and introduced once more. These are, in short, ornithological avatars that, beginning with the eagle on the banner of the legionnaires, later take the form of Picasso’s dove, until by the time we reach the present day we find talons growing once more beneath its bedraggled plumage. No longer does this feathered creature fly back to the biblical Ark bearing an olive branch, it now returns to the Ark of Assets with a dollar clutched in its strong beak.

Of course, all of this is well seasoned with compassionate arguments. And we should be concerned by such events, because **even when these “neutral” forces intervene in third countries for humanitarian reasons clear to all, they are setting precedents that may subsequently be used to justify new actions whose motives are neither so humanitarian nor so clear to all.** As a result of the process of globalization, the United Nations is seen to be playing an increasingly military role, one that entails more than a few risks. Once again the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples are being imperiled by this manipulation of the concepts of peace and international solidarity.

Let us set aside now for another occasion themes related to peace in order to look more closely at human rights which, it is clear, are not limited solely to questions of conscience, political freedoms, and freedom of expression. Nor can protecting these rights be reduced simply to preventing the persecution, imprisonment, or deaths of citizens who have disagreements with a given government. That is, the defense of human rights cannot be limited only to defending people who are facing the actual or potential exercise of direct physical violence against them. Although certain basic ideas have been embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is a great deal of confusion and much uncoordinated work surrounding these issues.

3. The Other Human Rights

The second article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

> Article 2. 1. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Among the rights enumerated are the following:

> Article 23. 1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and also to protection against unemployment.
>
> Article 25. 1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

These articles, signed by the member states, are based on the concept of the equality and universality of human rights. In neither the spirit nor the letter of the declaration do we find conditions such as: These rights will be respected *as long as they do not disturb macroeconomic variables*. Or any statement such as: The rights declared will be respected *as soon as* we become a society of prosperity. Yet the meaning of these articles could be twisted by appealing to Article 22:

> Article 22. 1. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation *and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State*, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. [emphasis added]

The phrase “and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state” could be used to dilute the effective exercise of these rights, and this leads us directly to the discussion of economic models.

Let us consider, for example, a country with sufficient organization and resources to enter the system of free market economies. As this transition takes place, the State will be reduced to a mere “administrator,” while private enterprise will focus solely on the development of business. Budgets for health care, education, and social security will be steadily reduced as the State ceases to play a role in assisting the people. In the end, the government will no longer have obligations in these areas, nor will private enterprise assume responsibility to meet these needs. The laws that could have required business to protect these rights are being rescinded or rewritten as companies increasingly resist all regulations, even those related to the health and safety of their own employees.

But the idea and practice of privatizing health care will save the day by allowing private enterprise to fill the vacuum left during the previous stage of transition. This model will be reproduced in every field as “privatism” advances, offering its efficient services to everyone who is able to pay for them—an arrangement that will serve very well to meet the needs of some twenty percent of the population.

Who, then, will protect the universal and egalitarian conception of human rights if they are exercised “in accordance with the organization and resources of each State”? For the defenders of that ideology will continue to assure us that the smaller the State becomes, the more the economy of that country will prosper. This discussion soon passes, however, from idyllic declarations about the coming “general prosperity” to brutal statements with the character of ultimatums delivered in roughly these terms: If laws are passed that place limitations on capital, capital will flee the country and there will be no foreign investment, international loans, or refinancing of previously contracted debts. Then exports and production will fall and, in short, the whole social order will be put at risk. This displays in its stark simplicity one of the many contemporary schemes for extortion.

While the example considered above is of a country with sufficient resources to negotiate the passage toward a free market economy, it is easy to imagine how much more difficult the circumstances would be if the country in question did not possess the basic requisites of resources and organization.

As the New World Order is now proposed, and in light of economic interdependence, **in all countries, rich and poor alike, the forces of capital will try to undermine the universal and egalitarian conception of human rights.**

The previous discussion cannot be strictly derived from the grammatical terms of Article 22, because neither in that article nor elsewhere in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is any economic consideration placed above the people that relativizes their rights. Nor is it legitimate to introduce tangential arguments by proposing, for example, that since the economy is the basis of social development, we must first dedicate all our efforts to macroeconomic variables, so that when we achieve prosperity then we will be able to attend to human rights. This is as clumsily linear as saying: Because society is subject to the law of gravity, we need to concentrate first on this problem, and only when we have solved it will we be free to speak of human rights. In a sane society no one thinks of constructing buildings on unstable foundations because everyone recognizes the conditions that gravity sets. Similarly, everyone is well aware of economic conditionings and the importance of resolving them correctly *as a function of human life.* But these digressions take us away from our theme.

The consideration of human rights cannot be reduced only to the foregoing questions of work, compensation, and assistance, just as earlier we saw they could not be limited solely to the ambits of political expression and freedom of conscience. And although there are certain defects of expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notwithstanding these it is clear that a scrupulous application of its articles by all governments would be sufficient for our world to experience a positive change of great importance.

4. The Universality of Human Rights and the Cultural Thesis

There exist diverse conceptions of the human being, and this variety of points of view is often related to the different cultures from which people observe reality. And these issues necessarily affect the question of human rights as a whole. Indeed, faced with the idea of a universal human being with the same rights and functions in all societies, today some are raising a *cultural thesis* in defense of a different position regarding these questions. The supporters of this position regard supposedly universal human rights as simply a generalization of the Western point of view in an unjustified claim of universal validity. For example, consider Article 16:

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

These three sub-paragraphs in Article 16 present numerous difficulties of interpretation and application in various cultures that stretch from the eastern Mediterranean through the Middle East and into Africa and Asia—that is to say, they create difficulties for the greater part of humanity. The world is so large and so varied that over vast parts of it not even marriage and the family coincide with the parameters that seem so “natural” to the West. As a consequence, these institutions and the universal human rights associated with them are the subject of continuing debate.

The same occurs if we consider the general conceptions of law and justice. If we compare ideas regarding criminal punishment and the rehabilitation of criminals, we find no agreement on these points even among nations from the same Western cultural context. To uphold the point of view of one’s own culture as valid for all of humanity, then, leads to positions that are frankly

ludicrous. For example, the legal penalty of cutting off the hand of a thief as practiced in certain Arab countries is viewed as a clear violation of human rights in the United States—while at the same time they like to hold academic debates on whether to execute criminals by the use of cyanide gas, 2,000 volts of electricity, lethal injection, hanging, or some other macabre delight of capital punishment. It should be noted, however, that just as in the United States a significant proportion of the society rejects capital punishment, so too in Arab countries many oppose corporal punishment for those who have broken the law.

Even the West itself, swept along by changing practices and customs, is having great difficulty in trying to uphold its traditional idea of the "natural" family. Can a family today contain adopted children? Of course it can. Can a family have spouses who are members of the same sex? Some legislatures already allow this. What, then, defines the family—its "natural" character or the voluntary commitment of people to fulfill certain functions? On what basis can we say that the monogamous family of some cultures is better than the polygamous one of others? And if this is the state of the discussion, can we continue to speak of a single set of laws that is universally applicable to the family? Which human rights are to be defended—and which are not—regarding the institution of the family?

Clearly, the dialectic between the universalist thesis (hardly universal even in its own culture) and the cultural thesis cannot be resolved in the case of the family (which I have considered as only one of many possible examples), just as I am afraid that for now it will remain similarly unresolved for other areas of the social endeavor.

To sum this up: Here we find in play a general conception of the human being that is not sufficiently well-founded to encompass the many positions in conflict. Yet the need for such a comprehensive conception is evident, because neither the law in general nor human rights in particular can prevail if their deepest meaning is not clear.

No longer can we raise the most general questions of law only in the abstract. **Either we are dealing with rights that, to have effect, must flow from established power, or we are dealing with rights that are only aspirations yet to be fulfilled.** In regard to the issue of rights, I have written elsewhere [see the chapter "Law" in *The Human Landscape*]:

> Practical people who have not become lost in theorizing have declared that law is necessary in order for there to be social coexistence. It is also said that the law is made to defend the interests of those who impose it.
>
> It seems that in the situation previous to power a particular law is installed, which in turn legitimizes that power. So it is that power, as the imposition of an intention—whether accepted or not—is the central issue. It is said that force does not generate rights, but paradoxically this statement is normally accepted only when force is thought of as brutal physical fact, when in reality force—economic, political, and so on—does not need to be expressed perceptually to make its presence felt and to demand respect. In any case, even physical force, that of arms, for example, expressed as naked threat creates situations that are justified legally, and we cannot deny that the use of arms in one direction or another depends on human intention and not on a right.

And further on:

> All those who violate the law are ignoring a situation that is asserted in the present, exposing their temporality—their future—to the decisions of others. But it is clear that

this “present” in which the law begins to take effect has its roots in the past. Customs, morality, religion, or social consensus are the sources customarily invoked to justify the existence of the law. Each depends in turn on the power that imposes it. And these sources are changed when the power that gave them origin declines or transforms so that maintaining the previous judicial order begins to clash with what is “reasonable,” with “common sense,” and so on. When the legislature repeals or rewrites a law, or a group of representatives of the people amend a country’s basic charter or constitution, they apparently do so without violating the law in general, because they are not subject to the decisions of others, because they hold power or act as the representatives of established power, and in this situation it is clear that power generates rights and obligations and not the reverse.

To end, let me cite the following:

Human rights do not have the universal application that would be desirable because they do not flow from the universal power of the human being, but only from the power that one part now exercises over the whole. If even the most elementary claims to the governing of one’s own body are trampled underfoot in all latitudes, then we can speak only of aspirations yet to become rights. **Human rights do not pertain to the past, they lie ahead in the future, calling our intentionality, sustaining a struggle that is rekindled in each new violation of humanity’s destiny. For this reason, every protest in favor of human rights has meaning because it shows the powers that be that they are not omnipotent and that they do not control the future.**

As for our general conception of the human being, it does not seem necessary to review it here or to reaffirm that the recognition we give to diverse cultural realities does not invalidate the existence of a common human structure that is in historical flux in a converging direction. The struggle to establish a *universal human nation* is also the struggle, from each culture, to put into practice human rights that are ever more coherently defined.

If the right to a fulfilled life and freedom is suddenly ignored in a certain culture, and other values placed above the human being, it is because something there has gone astray, something is diverging from our common destiny. Should this happen, then the expression of that culture *in that precise point* must be clearly repudiated.

It is true that the formulations of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are imperfect, but for now this is all that we have at hand to defend and to perfect. **Today these rights are still considered aspirations that cannot be fully realized given the established powers. The struggle for the full application of human rights leads necessarily to questioning the powers-that-be, orienting action toward replacing them with the powers of a new and human society.**

With this letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

November 21, 1993

Tenth Letter to My Friends

Dear Friends,

Toward what destiny are present-day events heading? Optimists feel that we will soon find ourselves in a worldwide society of abundance in which society's problems will be solved—a sort of paradise on Earth. Pessimists believe that current symptoms indicate a growing sickness of both institutions and human groups—the entire population and ecological system—a sort of hell on Earth. In contrast, those who view historical mechanisms as relative feel that everything rests on our present behavior—that heaven or hell depend on our actions. Of course, there are others not in the least interested in what happens to anyone other than themselves.

Among these varied opinions, the important one to us is that the future depends on what we do today. Yet even within this position there are differences of approach.

Some say that, since this crisis has been brought on by the voracity of the banking system and the multinational companies, when these problems reach the point of endangering their interests they will set mechanisms of recovery in motion, just as they have done on previous occasions. In regard to action, such people favor gradually adapting to the reform processes they claim are converting capitalism to the benefit of the majorities.

Others argue that we cannot let everything depend solely on the good will of the few, and what is required therefore is to demonstrate the will of the majority through political action and by educating the people, who now live in a situation of extortion under the dominant scheme of things. According to them, a moment of general crisis for the system will come, and it will be important to take advantage of this for the cause of the revolution.

Finally, there are those who maintain that capital as well as labor, all cultures, nations, and organizational forms, all artistic and religious expressions, all human groups and individuals are caught up in a process of technological acceleration and destructuring that is beyond their control. Flowing out of a long historical process, things today have reached a point of worldwide crisis that is affecting every political and economic scheme. And both the general process of disorganization and the general recovery will proceed independently of any such schemes.

Those who uphold this structural point of view stress that it is necessary to forge a global understanding of these phenomena at the same time that one acts locally in societal, group, and personal areas of some minimum specificity. Given how interconnected the world is, **they do not believe that any step-by-step gradualism society will supposedly adopt over time can be successful—instead they strive to generate a series of *demonstration effects* sufficiently energetic to produce a general inflection in the process.**

They therefore champion the constructive capacity of human beings to unite and transform economic relationships, to change institutions, and to struggle tirelessly in dismantling all of the factors that are bringing about a regressive involution with no way out. As contemporary humanists we hold this last position. Clearly, of course, this as well as the previous descriptions have been simplified, omitting the multiplicity of variants that can be derived from each of them.

1. Destructuring and Its Limits

It is pertinent here to point out the limits of political destructuring, which will not stop until this process reaches down to the base of society and every individual.

Let us consider some examples. The weakening of centralized political power is more evident in some countries than in others. As they take advantage of the growing strength of autonomous regions or the pressure of secessionist movements, certain interest groups or simple opportunists wish to stop the process of destructuring at exactly the point that will leave control of the situation in their hands. According to their aspirations, once a canton has seceded, a new republic has separated from the former nation, or an autonomous region has been freed from the central power, it ought now to continue as the new organizational structure.

What happens instead is that these new powers are in turn challenged by the micro-regions, counties, cities, and towns that lie within them. None of these constituent units can see why an autonomous region that has been freed from a former central power should now centralize power over its component areas, no matter how vigorously the new region may offer as rationales the sharing of language, a common folklore, or even some ineffable “historical and cultural collectivity.” This is because when it comes to paying taxes and allocating budgets, the relevance of folklore extends only as far as tourism and record companies. And were the cities to be freed from the newly independent region, the neighborhoods would apply this same logic, and so on down the scale until this reaches even the neighbors who live on opposite sides of the street.

Then someone may say, “Why should those of us who live on this side of the street have to pay the same taxes as those on the other side? We have a higher standard of living, and our taxes are only going to solve the problems of those other people who don’t even try to get ahead through their own efforts. It’s better for each to take care of their own.” And so on down the scale until one hears the same concerns expressed even in the individual houses in the neighborhood—and no one will be able to stop this mechanical process at precisely the stage that interests them. That is, things will not come to a stop in a simple process of medieval-style feudalization, a situation that corresponded to small, thinly scattered populations whose sporadic contact and interchange took place through means of communication controlled by quarreling feudal lords or bands of toll and tax collectors. Today’s situation does not at all resemble that of previous eras in terms of production, consumption, technology, communications, population density, and many other factors.

At the same time, economic blocs and common markets will increasingly absorb the decision-making power that nations formerly held. In a given area, newly autonomous regions will be able to escape from their former national entity, but at the same time cities or groups of cities within them will bypass the old administrative levels, seeking inclusion as full members in the new regional superstructure. And the regional economic entities will give serious consideration to those independent regions, cities, or groups of cities that possess strong economic potential.

In the economic warfare among the various regional blocs, there is nothing to prevent certain member countries from beginning to establish “bilateral” or “multilateral” relations with other areas, thus escaping the orbit of the regional market of which they form a part. Why couldn’t the United Kingdom, for example, establish closer ties with the NAFTA, beginning at first with a few exceptions to existing European arrangements. Later on, depending on the progress of the relationship, what would stop it from eventually abandoning its former market to

join the North American regional market? Or if Quebec were to secede from Canada, what would keep it from opening negotiations outside the region of the NAFTA? In Latin America it is clear that organizations such as the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC) or the Andean Pact (Pacto Andino) are no longer viable, as already we see Columbia and Chile beginning to integrate their economies with an eye to inclusion in the NAFTA, even as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) is affected by possible regional secessions within Brazil.

Moreover, if Turkey, Algeria, and countries south of the Mediterranean begin to join the European Common Market, other countries that are excluded could tend to strengthen their mutual ties and negotiate as a group with regional markets of other geographical areas. And while powers such as China and Russia as well as the countries of Eastern Europe continue to undergo rapid centrifugal transformations, what effects will this have on the regional blocs as they are now visualized?

While it is unlikely that things will turn out exactly as described in these examples, the tendency toward regionalization may well take unexpected turns, resulting in arrangements quite different from those schemes now proposed based on geographical contiguity, and therefore relying on conventional geopolitical prejudices. So it is that fresh disturbances may befall today's newly laid schemes and strategies, whose objectives go beyond simple economic union and include the intention to form political and military blocs.

Since in the end it will be the forces of big capital that decide things based on what is most favorable for the evolution of their businesses, no one should imagine with too much certainty regional maps drawn as in the past in accordance with geographical contiguity, in which highway and rail links radiating from central points play the principal role. The trend today is toward arrangements redesigned around high-volume air and ship traffic supported by worldwide satellite communications.

Even by colonial times, geographical proximity had already been replaced by the far-flung overseas checkerboard of the great powers, which with the two world wars entered decline. For some, the present rearrangements take the problem back to pre-colonial stages, and they imagine that an economic bloc must be organized in a spatial continuum, through which they project their own particular nationalism into a sort of regional "nationalism."

In short, **the limits of destructuring are not given in particular by those countries or autonomous regions newly freed from a central power or in general by economic regions organized according to geographical contiguity. The lower limits of destructuring reach right down to each neighbor and individual, while the upper limits reach the world community as a whole.**

2. Some Important Areas of the Phenomenon of Destructuring

Among many possible areas in the process of destructuring, I would like to focus on three areas in particular: the political, the religious, and the generational.

It is clear that, in general, various political parties, arising from time to time as "right," "center," and "left," will alternate holding the now-reduced power of the State. Already we are seeing many "surprises," and still others are in store as forces long supposed to have disappeared emerge once more, and coalitions and alignments enthroned for decades dissolve amid widespread scandal. While this is nothing new in the game of politics, what is genuinely

original is that ostensibly opposed political factions are succeeding each other without altering in the slightest the process of destructuring, which of course affects them, too. And in regard to the proposals, language, and style of politics, we will witness a general syncretism in which ideological profiles fuse, growing more blurred with each passing day.

Faced with this battle of slogans and empty forms, average citizens will continue to distance themselves from any kind of participation, to concentrate only on what is most immediate and perceptual. But social discontent will continue to intensify, making itself felt through spontaneous protests, civil disobedience, outbursts of unrest, and the appearance of psycho-social phenomena with explosive growth. In these circumstances, new forms of irrationalism are emerging and, with various forms of intolerance as their rallying cries, growing dangerously close to gaining ascendancy.

In light of this, it is clear that if a central power wishes to stifle demands for independence, it will feel moved to adopt increasingly radical positions in order to draw other political groups into its sphere. What party will be able to remain uninvolved—at the risk of losing its influence—if violence sparked by territorial, ethnic, religious, or cultural disputes explodes in a given point?

Political factions will have to take positions on such issues, as we see today in various parts of Africa (where there are 18 points in conflict); the Americas (4 points in conflict—Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, without including the claims of indigenous peoples in Ecuador and other countries of the Americas, or the deteriorating racial situation in the United States); Asia (10 points in conflict, counting the Chinese-Tibetan conflict, but without considering the inter-canton differences arising throughout China); south and Pacific Asia (12 points, including the protests of the indigenous peoples of Australia); Western Europe (16 points); Eastern Europe (4 points, counting the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the former Yugoslavia, Cyprus, and the former Soviet Union as only one point each; there are over 30 points in conflict if we include the many countries of the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, which has inter-ethnic and border problems in more than 20 republics stretching well beyond Eastern Europe); and the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East (9 points in conflict).

Politicians will also be moved to echo the increasing radicalization that the traditional religions are experiencing, such as that between Muslims and Hindus in India and Pakistan, between Muslims and Christians in the former Yugoslavia and Lebanon, and between Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka. They will have to respond to the fighting between sects within a given religion such as that between Sunnis and Shiites in the sphere of influence of Islam, and between Catholics and Protestants in the sphere of influence of Christianity. They will be drawn to participate in the religious persecution that has begun, first in the West, through the press and the passing of laws restricting freedom of religion and conscience.

It is clear that the traditional religions will try to impede the newer religious forms that are now awakening all over the world. According to the “experts” and pundits, who are normally atheists but objectively allied with the dominant sect of their area, the harassment of the new religious groups “does not constitute a limitation on freedom of thought, but rather a protection for the freedom of belief that now finds itself under attack by the brainwashing of the new cults, which, furthermore, are undermining our civilization’s traditional values, culture, and way of life.”

In this way, politicians usually far removed from the theme of religion are beginning to take part in this witch-hunt because, among other things, they note the massive popularity that these new expressions of faith—which also carry an undercurrent of revolution—are beginning to achieve. No longer will they be able to claim as in the nineteenth century that “religion is the opiate of the masses.” No longer can they speak of the slumbering isolation of the masses and

the individual, when Muslim populations are proclaiming the establishment of Islamic republics, when in Japan (with the collapse of the national religion of Shintoism following World War II) Buddhism formed the motor that carried the Komeito to power, when the Catholic Church is launching new political ventures in the wake of the exhaustion of Christian Socialism and Third Worldism in Latin America and Africa. In any event, the atheist philosophers of the new times will have to change the terms of their discourse, replacing the phrase “opiate of the masses” with the phrase “amphetamine of the masses.”

Leaders will also have to take positions regarding youth, increasingly characterized as constituting a “threat to society,” with dangerous tendencies toward drugs, violence, and lack of communication. Those leaders who persist in ignoring the profound roots of these problems will be in no position to give satisfactory answers simply by inviting young people to participate in conventional politics or the traditional cults, or to enjoy the offerings of a decadent civilization controlled by money. Meanwhile, such leaders are contributing to the psychic destruction of an entire generation and the rise of despicable new economic powers that grow rich by preying on the anguish and psychological alienation of millions of human beings.

Many leaders now ask in surprise where this growing violence among young people is coming from—as if it were not these leaders themselves, the former or current generations to hold power, who have overseen the perfecting of a systematic violence, exploiting even the advances in science and technology to make their manipulations ever more efficient.

Some point to a supposed “autism” among youth and, based on this view, attempt to establish relationships between the increasing lifespans of adults and the longer period of education and training required before young people are allowed to enter full participation. This explanation, while not without basis, is certainly not sufficient to understand these more ample processes. What we can observe is that the generational dialectic, the motor of history, has become temporarily stalled, and with this a dangerous abyss has opened between two worlds.

Here it is interesting to recall that over two decades ago, when a certain thinker warned of these incipient tendencies that today we find expressed in substantive problems, those fine Mandarins, flanked by their “experts” and formers of opinion, succeeded only in tearing their vestments in frenzied accusations that it was just such discourse that was, in addressing these problems, somehow *causing* the war between the generations.

In those times, a powerful force of youth that should have heralded the advent of a new phenomenon as well as the creative extension of the historical process, was diverted by the diffuse exigencies of the decade of the sixties and pushed into a dead-end guerrilla struggle in various parts of the world.

Further problems are sure to befall those who now expect the new generations simply to channel all their desperation into tumultuous music or the sports stadium, limiting their protests to t-shirts and posters bearing innocent slogans. The situation of asphyxia for young people creates irrational and cathartic conditions that are ripe to be channeled by fascists, authoritarians, and the violent of all types. Nor is sowing seeds of mistrust and viewing every young person as a potential criminal the way to reestablish a dialogue between the generations. No one, moreover, is showing any enthusiasm for allowing the new generations access to society’s communications media, nor are those in control inclined toward public discussion of these issues unless they are dealing with “model youth” who, accompanied by rock music, simply parrot the established political wisdom or venture forth in the spirit of Boy Scouts to clean seabirds covered with oil—but without questioning the forces of big capital, which continue to produce these ever-widening ecological disasters!

I fear that any genuine youth organization (whether student, artistic, labor, or religious) will be suspected of the worst kinds of misdeeds simply because they are not sponsored by a union, political party, foundation, or church. Despite so much manipulation of young people, there are still those who ask why youth do not embrace the marvelous proposals proffered by the established powers, adding that it would be to the benefit of these future citizens to busy themselves with study, work, and sports. Were this to occur, no one would have to worry about any "lack of responsibility" among such busy young people.

However, if unemployment should continue to climb, if the recession should become chronic, if everywhere the phenomenon of marginalizing and neglecting young people should continue to grow, then we shall see what today's lack of participation develops into. For various reasons—wars, hunger, unemployment, moral fatigue—the generational dialectic itself has become destructured, producing a silence that has lasted for two long decades, a silence now being shattered by heart-rending cries and acts of desperation that lead nowhere.

In light of all of the above, it seems abundantly clear that no one will be able to reasonably orient the processes of a world that is fast dissolving. While this dissolution is tragic, it is at the same time illuminating the birth of a new civilization—the world civilization. And if this is happening, then a certain type of collective mentality must also be disintegrating, as a new way of being conscious of the world emerges. Regarding this point, I would like to include here something said in the first letter:

> A new sensibility is being born that corresponds to these changing times. It is a sensibility that grasps the world as a whole—an awareness that the problems people experience in one place involve other people, even if they are far away. Increasing communication, trade, and the rapid movement of entire human groups from one place on the planet to another all attest to this growing process of globalization.
>
> As the global character of more and more problems comes to be understood, new criteria for action arise. There is an awareness that the work of those who desire a better world will be effective only if they make their efforts grow outward from the environment where they already have some influence. In sharp contrast to other times, so full of empty phrases meant only to garner external recognition, today people are beginning to find value in humble and deeply felt work, work done not to enhance one's self-image, but rather to change oneself and bring about change in one's immediate environment of family, work, and friendship.
>
> Those who truly care for people do not disdain this work done without fanfare, this work that proves so incomprehensible to those opportunists who were formed in an earlier landscape of leaders and masses—a landscape in which they learned well how to use others to catapult themselves to society's heights.
>
> When a person comes to the realization that schizophrenic individualism is a dead end, when they openly communicate what they are thinking and what they are doing to everyone they know without the ridiculous fear of not being understood, when they approach others not as some anonymous mass but with a real interest in each person, when they encourage teamwork in both the interchange of ideas and the realization of common projects, when they clearly demonstrate the need to spread this task of rebuilding the social fabric that others have destroyed, when they feel that even the most "unimportant" person is of greater human quality than some heartless individual whom circumstance has elevated to what is, for now, the pinnacle of success—when

all this happens it is because within this person destiny has once again begun to speak, the destiny that has moved entire peoples along their best evolutionary path, the destiny that has been so many times distorted and so many times forgotten, but is always re-encountered in the twists and turns of history.

Today we can glimpse not only a new sensibility and a new mode of action but also a new moral attitude and a new tactical approach to facing life.

Today, hundreds of thousands of people all over the world affirm the ideas embodied in the "Statement of the Humanist Movement" [see Sixth Letter to My Friends, this volume]. They are Communist-Humanists, Socialist-Humanists, Liberal-Humanists, Environmentalist-Humanists, and a great many others, all of whom, without abandoning their own causes, take one step toward the future. They are people who struggle for peace, for human rights, and for an end to discrimination. Among them are, of course, both atheists and those who have faith in human beings and their transcendence. And all of them have in common a passion for social justice, an ideal of human brotherhood based on the convergence of diversity, a disposition to leap beyond all prejudice, and a coherent personality in which their personal lives are not separate from the struggle for a new world.

3. Targeted Action

There are still political militants who worry about who will be the next president, prime minister, senator, or representative. It is possible that they do not yet fully comprehend the real extent of the destructuring toward which everything is heading and how little any of these "hierarchs" will mean for the transformation of society. There will also be more than one case in which such anxiety is linked to the personal situation of these supposed militants, who are worried about their own position in the world of political deal-making.

The key question in any case is for people to focus on **understanding how to establish priorities among the conflicts in the places where they carry out their daily lives and to know how to organize valid and effective action fronts based on such conflicts.**

In each situation it is important to understand what characteristics are required to form grassroots committees on health, education, labor, student, and other issues, and what characteristics are necessary for *centers for direct communication* and networks of *neighborhood councils*. It needs to be clear how to give participation to even the smallest and least noticed of those organizations through which people express their work, culture, sports, and religiosity.

Here it is useful to explain that when we refer to people's immediate environment of coworkers, family, and friends, we are emphasizing in particular the *places* in which these relationships occur.

Speaking in spatial terms, the minimum unit of action is the neighborhood, for it is here that people feel each conflict, even though the roots of that conflict may be far away. A *center for direct communication* forms a place in the neighborhood where people can directly discuss all economic and social problems, as well as all the problems of health care, education, and the quality of life in general.

The political focus is to give a higher priority to the neighborhoods than to the city, county, state, province, or even a newly independent region or the country as a whole. In truth, long before nations were formed, people congregated together in human communities where, as they put down roots, they became neighbors. Later on, administrative superstructures were set

up that increasingly robbed the neighborhoods of their autonomy and power. Yet the legitimacy of any given order derives only from the inhabitants—from these neighbors—and it is from them that all representation in a real democracy must arise.

Every town and city should be in the hands of its neighborhoods and, if this is the case, no one can coherently propose the objective of setting up multiple layers of representatives or deputies, as occurs in leader-dominated hierarchical politics. Rather, all such arrangements can only be the *result* of the grassroots operation of the organized social base. The concept of *neighborhood* applies to populations that are spread out, as well as to those concentrated within a limited area or living in large apartment buildings or complexes.

It is important for the neighborhoods to decide among themselves, through the structures that connect them, the status of their district. And their decisions within this district should, of course, not depend on some faraway superstructure that simply dictates orders.

When several neighborhoods set a *humanist district action plan* in motion, and their district, town, or city proceeds to organize real democracy, this *demonstration effect* will make itself felt far beyond the boundaries of that bastion. And rather than proposing a gradualism through which this new approach will little by little gain territory until finally it has spread to every corner of a country, what is key is to demonstrate in practice that in at least one place a new system is working.

The detailed problems presented by all of the above are of course numerous, and it would be beyond the scope of this letter to attempt to treat them here.

With this final letter I send my warmest regards,

Silo

December 15, 1993

Notes to Letters to My Friends

Seventh Letter to My Friends

1. G. Petrovich, “La necesidad de un concepto de revolución,” La filosofía y las ciencias sociales, Primer coloquio nacional de filosofía, Morelia, Mexico, 4–9 de agosto de 1975, (Editorial Grijalbo, 1976). [“The Need for a Concept of Revolution,” Philosophy and Social Sciences, First National Colloquium on Philosophy, Morelia, Mexico, August 4–9, 1975.]

Eighth Letter to My Friends

2. Silo, “La Necesidad de una Posición Humanista en las Fuerzas Armadas Contemporáneas,” Conferencia internacional sobre Humanización de las actividades militares y reforma de las Fuerzas Armadas, patrocinada por el Ministerio de Defensa de la CEEII, Moscú, 24–28 de mayo de 1993. [“The Need for a Humanist Position in the Contemporary Armed Forces,” International Conference on Humanizing Military Activities and Reform of the Armed Forces, sponsored by the Ministry of Defense of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Moscow, May 24–28, 1993].

Silo Speaks

An Anthology of Opinions, Commentaries, and Speeches

1969–1995

Note to the Reader

This book is a compilation of the speeches and other public addresses given by Silo over the course of the better part of three decades. Also included are three explanatory notes. The first precedes Silo's public address of May 4, 1969. In that note, we attempt to give the reader some feeling for the circumstances surrounding that event, at which Silo for the first time publicly expressed the foundation of his thought. The second note precedes Silo's talk of September 27, 1981, in Madrid, Spain, and the third note is the introduction of Silo preceding his talk "Religiosity in the Contemporary World," which was given on June 6, 1986. The use of these prefatory notes in place of footnotes or endnotes comes from a desire to provide a context for Silo's words that the reader would otherwise lack, while avoiding interruptions in the flow of the discourse.

In this anthology we have not attempted to include the voluminous material comprising interviews of Silo by the news media, as that material requires a different treatment from the one employed in this volume.

The present texts are drawn from transcribed notes as well as audio and video recordings.

The Editors

I. Opinions, Commentaries, and Speeches

The Healing of Suffering

Punta de Vacas, Mendoza, Argentina, May 4, 1969

Notes:

1. At the time Silo gave this speech in 1969, the military dictatorship then in power in Argentina had banned all public gatherings in urban areas. Consequently, a bleak spot known as Punta de Vacas, high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile, was chosen as the location for the speech. Early in the morning of May 4, the authorities placed roadblocks on all roads leading to the site. Machine-gun posts, military vehicles, and armed soldiers were stationed along the roads, and everyone was required to show identification papers to pass through the checkpoints, which led to disputes with some members of the international press. Against the magnificent backdrop of the snow-capped Andes, Silo began to speak to an audience of some two hundred people. The day was cold and bright, and by noon the event was over.

2. This is Silo's first public expression of his ideas. In poetic language, he explains that the most important knowledge for living ("true wisdom") is not the same as the knowledge found in books—knowledge of universal laws or things of that type—but is a question of inner experience. The most important knowledge for living is related to comprehending suffering and how to surpass it.

In this speech, Silo presents a very simple thesis, which is divided into several parts: (1) It begins by distinguishing between physical pain *and its derivations, on the one hand, maintaining that they can be made to recede through progress in science and justice, and* mental suffering, *on the other, which cannot be eliminated by such means. (2) Suffering comes through three pathways: the pathway of perception, the pathway of memory, and the pathway of imagination. (3) Suffering reveals a state of violence. (4) Violence is rooted in desire. (5) There are various degrees and forms of desire. By attending to these factors ("through inner meditation"), one may advance.*

Thus: (6) Desire gives rise to violence ("the more gross the desires"), which does not remain inside *people but spreads to others, contaminating the space of relationships. (7) Violence can be seen in various forms besides its primary form of physical violence. (8) We need simple forms of conduct by which to orient our lives ("keep simple commandments"): Learn to be a bearer of peace, joy, and, above all, hope.*

Conclusion: To conquer physical pain, science and justice are necessary; to conquer mental suffering, it is indispensable to surpass primitive desires.

If you have come to listen to a man who it is thought transmits wisdom, you have mistaken your way, for true wisdom is not communicated through books or speeches—true wisdom is found in the depths of your consciousness, just as true love is found in the depths of your heart. If you have come at the urging of slanderers and hypocrites to listen to this man so that what you hear today may later be used against him, you have mistaken your way, because this man has not come here to ask anything of you or to use you, because he does not need you.

You are listening to a man who does not know the laws that rule the Universe, who is not privy to the laws of History, who is ignorant of the relationships that govern the peoples of the world. High in these mountains, far from the cities and their sick ambitions, this man addresses himself to your conscience. Over the cities, where each day is a struggle—a hope cut short by death—where love is followed by hate, where forgiveness is followed by revenge; over the cities of the people rich and poor; over the immense fields of humanity, a mantle of suffering and sorrow has fallen. You suffer when pain bites your body. You suffer when hunger seizes your body. But you suffer not only from your body's immediate pain and hunger, you also suffer from the consequences of the diseases that afflict it.

We must distinguish between two types of suffering. There is the suffering that occurs during illness, which recedes with the advance of science, just as hunger can recede if the empire of justice advances. There is also the suffering that does not depend on the sickness of your body but yet derives from that sickness: If you are disabled, if you cannot see, if you cannot hear, you suffer. But though such suffering derives from your body, or from the diseases of your body, that suffering is of your mind.

There is yet another kind of suffering that does not recede even with the advance of science or with the advance of justice. This type of suffering, which belongs strictly to your mind, retreats before faith, before joy in life, before love. You must understand that this suffering is always rooted in the violence that exists in your own consciousness. You suffer because you fear losing what you have, or because of what you have already lost, or because of what you desperately long to reach. You suffer because of what you lack, or because you fear in general.

These, then, are the great enemies of humanity: fear of sickness, fear of poverty, fear of death, fear of loneliness. All these forms of suffering pertain to your mind, and all of them reveal your inner violence, the violence that is in your mind. Notice how that violence always stems from *desire.* The more violent a person is, the more gross are that person's desires.

I would like to tell you a story that took place long ago.

There was once a traveler who had to undertake a long journey. He yoked his animal to a cart and began the journey to his faraway destination, a journey he had to complete within a certain length of time. He called the animal *Necessity* and the cart *Desire;* one wheel of the cart he called *Pleasure,* and the other he called *Pain*. Our traveler turned his cart sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, yet he never ceased moving toward his destiny. The faster the cart traveled, the faster turned the wheels of Pleasure and Pain, carrying as they did the cart of Desire and connected as they were by the same axle.

But the journey was very long, and after a time our traveler grew bored. So he decided to decorate his cart, and he began to adorn it with all manner of beautiful things. But the more he embellished the cart of Desire with these ornaments, the heavier became the load for Necessity to pull. On the curves and steep hills of the road, the poor animal grew too exhausted to pull the cart of Desire. And where the road was soft, the wheels of Pleasure and Suffering became mired in the earth.

One day, because the road was long and he was still very far from his destination, our traveler grew desperate. That night he decided to meditate on the problem, and in the midst of his meditation he heard the neighing of his old friend, Necessity. Comprehending the message, he arose very early the next morning and began to lighten the cart of its burden, stripping it of all its fine adornments. Then he set off once more toward his destination, with the animal Necessity pulling the cart at a brisk trot. Still, our traveler had already lost much time—time that was now irrecoverable. The next night he sat down again to meditate, and he realized, thanks to another message from his old friend, that now he had to undertake a task that was doubly difficult because it involved his letting go. At daybreak he sacrificed the cart of Desire. It is true that when he did so he lost the wheel of Pleasure, but then he also lost the wheel of Suffering. And so, abandoning the cart of Desire, he mounted the animal called Necessity and galloped on its back across the green fields until he reached his destiny.

See how desire can trap you. But notice that there are desires of different qualities. There are cruder desires, and there are more elevated desires. Elevate desire, purify desire, surpass desire! In doing so, surely you will have to sacrifice the wheel of Pleasure—but you will also become free of the wheel of Suffering.

Spurred by desire, the violence in a person does not simply remain like a sickness in the consciousness of that person—it acts in the world of other people and is exercised upon them. And do not think that when I talk of violence I am speaking only about the armed act of war, where some men destroy others. That is only one form of physical violence.

There is also economic violence. Economic violence is the violence through which you exploit other people; economic violence occurs when you steal from another, when you are no longer a brother or sister to others but a bird of prey feeding upon them.

There is also racial violence. Or do you think that you are not being violent when you persecute someone because that person is not of your own race? Do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you malign that person for being of a race different from your own?

And there is religious violence: Do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you refuse work to, close your doors to, or dismiss a person, because that person does not share your religious beliefs? Do you believe that it is not violence when you use words of hate to build walls around other people, excluding them from your society, because they do not share your religious beliefs—isolating them within their families, segregating them and their loved ones, because they do not share your religion?

There are other forms of violence that are imposed by the Philistine morality. You wish to impose your way of life upon another; you wish to impose your vocation upon another. But who has told you that you are an example that must be followed? Who has told you that you can impose a way of life because it pleases you? What makes your way of life a model, a pattern that you have the right to impose on others? This, then, is another form of violence.

Only inner faith and inner meditation can end the violence in you, in others, and in the world around you. All the other doors are false and do not lead away from this violence. This world is on the verge of exploding with no way to end the violence! Do not choose false doors. There are no politics that can solve this mad urge for violence. There is no political party or movement on the planet that can end the violence. Do not choose false doors that promise to lead away from the violence in the world… I have heard that all over the world young people are turning to false doors to try to escape the violence and inner suffering. They turn to drugs as a solution. Do not choose false doors to try to end the violence.

My brother, my sister, keep these simple commandments, as simple as these rocks, this snow, and this sun that bless us. Carry peace within you, and carry it to others. My brother, my sister—if you look back in history, you will see the human being bearing the face of suffering. Remember, even as you gaze at that suffering face, that it is necessary to move forward, and it is necessary to learn to laugh, and it is necessary to learn to love.

To you, my brother and sister, I cast this hope—this hope of joy, this hope of love—so that you elevate your heart and elevate your spirit, and so that you do not forget to elevate your body.

Valid Action

Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island, September 29, 1978

Talk in a Study Group

What actions are valid? This is a question that people have answered, or attempted to answer, in many different ways. They have tried, almost always on the basis of the goodness or the badness of an action, to discover what it is that makes an action valid. In other words, since antiquity people have attempted to answer what has been known as the question of ethics or morality. For many years we have been concerned with consulting others about what is moral and what it is immoral, what is good and what is bad. But fundamentally, our interest has been to discover what it is that makes an action *valid.*

People have given us a variety of answers. Some have given us religious answers, some have given legal answers, and others ideological answers. In all these answers, what we have been told is that there are certain ways in which people ought to do things, and other ways of doing things that they ought to avoid.

It has been very important for us to obtain a clear answer to this question, because a person's whole way of life follows from whether his or her actions go in one direction or another. All the varied elements that make up our lives find their place according to the direction that we take—my present situation corresponds to the direction that I take toward the future. So this question about which actions are valid and which are invalid, what is good and what is bad, affects not only the individual's future but his or her present as well. And it doesn't affect only the individual—it affects groups and even entire peoples.

The various religious positions have offered their solutions. So it is that if one is a believer in a certain religion, one must obey certain religious laws; one must follow certain precepts inspired by God. And that is valid for believers in that religion. But we find that different religions cite different precepts. Some religions say that one ought not to perform given actions so as to avoid a certain turn of events; others say it is to avoid a particular hell. Sometimes these religions, which in principle are universal, do not agree among themselves; they agree neither in their precepts nor in their commandments.

But what is most troubling in all of this is the situation of so many throughout the world who, though they may in good faith want to obey these precepts, these commandments, cannot do so because they do not *feel* them. And so for nonbelievers, who are unable to keep these commandments—and who, according to the religions, are also the children of God—it is as though they have been forsaken by God. It is not because a religion occupies the whole of the world geographically that it is a universal religion, however, but rather because it occupies the hearts of human beings, independent of the condition in which they live, independent of the latitude at which they live. And so religions present us with certain difficulties in regard to their answers about ethics.

This has led us to consult the judicial systems, inasmuch as they, too, are shapers of human conduct. These legal systems form our conduct and shape our behavior by laying down certain rules about what one ought to do or ought not to do in one's relationships, in one's social behavior. There are codes of many kinds to regulate relationships, extending even to penal

codes that establish punishments for various crimes, for behavior considered unsocial, or asocial, or antisocial. Legal systems, too, have tried to give their answer to the question of human conduct, in terms of what is good behavior and what is bad behavior. And like religions, they have given us their answer, and that is fine—fine for those who believe in a given legal system. Each legal system gives its own answer, and that is fine for that historical moment, fine for a given type of social organization—but none of this speaks to the individual who is having to follow one of these systems of conduct.

Although reasonable people will undoubtedly agree that it is interesting for social behavior to be regulated as a means of avoiding total chaos, such regulation is a technique of social organization, not a justification for any particular morality. And in fact, depending upon their development and depending upon the way they view their world, various human communities have regulated behavior legally or judicially in ways that are sometimes in striking contrast to one another. So it is clear that legal systems have no universal validity. They serve for a period of time, for a particular type of social structure, but they do not serve for all human beings or for all times and all places. And most important of all, they say nothing to the individual about what is good and what is bad.

We have also consulted various ideologies. These ideologies are more development-friendly, so to speak, providing explanations that are quite a bit more colorful than either the somewhat dry legal systems or those precepts and laws handed down from above. Some of these doctrines characterize the human being as a kind of rapacious animal, a being that develops at the expense of everything else, that will proceed without regard for anything else, even without regard for other human beings. A kind of *will to power,* then, underlies this morality. Having appeared romantic to some, this morality is in fact success-oriented, and it says nothing to the individual about how to handle those times when things go badly in this quest for power.

There is another kind of ideology which tells us that, since everything in nature is in evolution, and the human being itself is the product of that evolution, and since the human being is the reflection of the conditions that prevail during a given period, then human behavior will be a reflection of the type of society in which a person lives. Thus, one class will have a certain type of morality, while a different class will have another. According to this point of view, morality is determined by objective conditions, by social relations, and by the mode of production. Then there's no need to worry, because one does what one is mechanically driven to do, even though for public relations purposes people talk of the morality of one class or another. Being limited to this mechanical development, I act as I do because I'm driven by mechanical forces to do so. But where is good and where is the evil in all of this? There is only the mechanical clash of particles in motion.

Other rather singular ideologies tell us, for instance, that morality is a social pressure that like a kind of super-ego serves to contain the force of impulses. Then, the compression brought about in the cauldron of the consciousness is what allows those basic impulses to be sublimated and gradually channeled in other directions.

So our poor friend, seeing himself variously defined by these often conflicting ideologies, finally sits down by the side of the road and says, "What am I supposed to do, then? On one side I'm constrained by social pressures, and yet at the same time I have impulses that apparently can be sublimated—if I'm an artist. But if I'm not, it's either lie down on the psychoanalyst's couch, or wind up neurotic." So morality appears as a way of controlling those impulses, which sometimes, however, still boil over.

There are other ideologies, also of a psychological nature, that explain good and bad on the basis of adaptation. But a morality of adaptive behavior—behavior that enables one to fit into one's society or, to the extent that one doesn't fit in, results in one's being segregated from it—entails problems of its own. That is, it says that the best thing you can do is just to walk the straight-and-narrow and try to "fit in." It tells us that what's good and what's bad is based on one's degree of adaptation, one's conformity to one's surroundings. And that's fine—it's another ideology.

In periods of great cultural exhaustion, as have occurred time and again in past civilizations, there tend to arise short-term, immediate answers to the question of what one should and should not do. I am referring to what could be called the "moral schools of decadence." As various cultures fell into decline, there arose moralists who tried to adapt their behavior as best they could in order to give some direction to their lives. Some said things like, "Life has no meaning, and since life has no meaning, anything goes—as long as I can get away with it." Others said, "Since life has little meaning (laughter), I should just do whatever I like, whatever feels good to me, regardless of how it affects anyone or anything else." And still others said, "Since I'm stuck in this bad situation, since life itself is nothing but suffering, I should just do what I have to do, do my duty and keep a stiff upper lip—I should be stoic." And that is the name of these schools of decadence, the Stoic schools.

Even though these schools represent what are in effect "emergency" answers to these questions of morality, behind them there is also ideology. The basic ideology appears to be that all meaning has been lost, and there is a corresponding urgent response to that loss of meaning. Today, for example, we find some who try to justify action with a theory of the absurd, into which the idea of "commitment" has been smuggled. But this is like the coercion imposed by the banks—that is, somehow I'm "committed" to something, and therefore I must fulfill my obligation. Yet it is difficult to understand how commitment can be established if the world I live in is absurd and ends in nothingness. Nor can this last position give the person who holds it much assurance.

The various religions, legal systems, ideological systems, and the moralities of decadence have all recognized the importance of the justification or lack of justification for human actions. So it is that they have all endeavored to give answers to this serious question of behavior in order to establish a morality, to define an ethics.

But what is the basis of truly *valid* action? The basis of valid action is not given by ideologies, or by religious mandates or beliefs, or by laws or social regulations. Even though all of these things have great importance, none of them provides a basis for valid action. Instead, the basis of valid action is given by the *inner register* that an individual has of that action. There is a fundamental difference between the valuation of an action when that valuation is seen to come from the outside, and when it is based on the internal register that human beings have of the actions they carry out.

And what is the *register* of an action that is valid? A valid action is experienced as giving one greater *unity.* At the same time, this action gives one a feeling of inner growth; it is something one desires to repeat because it has the flavor of *continuity in time.* Let's examine these aspects separately—the register of internal unity, on the one hand, and continuity in time on the other.

In the face of a difficult situation, I can choose among various ways of responding. If I'm harassed, for example, I can react violently to the irritation produced in me by that external stimulus, seeking in this way to relieve the tension provoked in me. If I react in this violent manner, I can experience relief as that tension is released. Thus, the first condition of valid

action has apparently been met—faced with an irritating stimulus, I remove it, and in doing so I un-tense myself, and in relieving myself of tension I have a register of unity.

But an action cannot be said to be valid simply because of that momentary relief of tension if this feeling does not continue in time; indeed, without this continuity the situation that occurs is exactly the opposite—a feeling of contradiction is produced in me. Suppose, for example, that at moment A I produce a release tension by reacting violently as I have previously described, but at moment B I find that I am not at all in agreement with what I did only a short while before. That kind of release of tension is not unitive, inasmuch as the succeeding moment contradicts the preceding one. To be valid, an action must also meet the requirement of giving one unity through time, without gaps or subsequent contradictions. We can all find many examples in which what seems to be a valid action at one moment is not so in the next. In such cases a person cannot coherently seek to prolong that action and that attitude, because the register is not one of unity but rather one of contradiction.

And there is yet another point to consider: the register of a *sensation of inner growth.* There are many actions that we carry out in the course of our daily lives that relieve various tensions. These actions have nothing to do with morality; we carry them out, and we release tensions. This alleviation of tension produces in turn a certain pleasure within us, but it doesn't go further than that. And when that tension arises once more, again we discharge it, and in capacitor-like fashion the charge rebuilds, until at a certain point it discharges once again. Finally, with all that charging and discharging like a capacitor, we find ourselves with the sensation of being trapped on an eternal wheel of actions, endlessly repeating. Even though there is a sensation of pleasure at the moment the tensions are discharged, we're left with a strange taste when we realize that if life is simply this wheel of repetitions, of successive pleasures and pains, then it can never be anything other than absurd. So it is that today I feel tension and I discharge it, and tomorrow the same… and so, like night follows day, the wheel of actions turns endlessly, independent of all human intention, independent of all human choice.

There are, however, actions of a different type, actions that we may perhaps have carried out only a few times in our lives. These are actions that give us a sense of great *unity* at the moment we do them. In addition, they give us a register that, through having done them, *something has become better in us*. These actions offer us a future project, in the sense that we feel that if we could *repeat them in the future* something in us would continue to grow, would continue to improve. These actions give us unity; they give us a sensation of inner growth, as well as a sensation of continuity in time. These, then, are the registers of valid action.

I have never said that this type of action is better or worse; nor have I said, coercively, that this is something that one *must* do. Rather, I've outlined proposals related to valid action and the systems of registers that correspond to these proposals. I have spoken of the actions that create unity and those that create contradiction and, lastly, of how valid actions can be perfected through repetition. And to complete that system of registers of valid actions I have said: "If you repeat your acts of internal unity, nothing can detain you." This refers not only to the register of unity, the sensation of inner growth, and to continuity in time, but also to the possibility of *improving* valid action, since clearly not everything that we do turns out well on the first try. In fact, quite often when we attempt new and interesting things, they don't turn out very well at first, but we know that with practice things can be improved. So it is that valid actions can also be perfected. Repeating those acts that give one unity and inner growth and that have continuity in time is something possible, and it is what constitutes the improvement of valid action.

In very general principles we have indicated the registers of valid action, and highest among these principles is the one known as the “golden rule.” This principle says, “When you treat others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself.” This is not a new principle—it is thousands of years old, and in many parts of the world, in many cultures, it has withstood the test of time. It is a universally accepted and valid principle that has been formulated in various ways—sometimes in the negative, as in “Do nothing to others that you do not want them to do to you.” That is simply another approach to the same idea, as is the formulation, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Of course, it is not exactly the same as saying, “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” But that’s all right; however they may have phrased it, since ancient times people have invoked this, the highest of all moral principles, the highest of all principles of valid action.

But how do I want others to treat me? Even if we take it as given that it is good to treat others as I want them to treat me, exactly *how* is it that I want to be treated? I will have to answer this question by saying that if other people treat me in certain ways they are treating me badly, and if they treat me in other ways they are treating me well. I will have to answer this in terms of *good* and *bad.* Once again, I will have to return to the eternal wheel of defining valid action according to one theory or another or one religion or another. For me, a certain thing is good, but another person may see this differently. And there will never fail to be people who treat others very badly, while still claiming to be applying the same principle, because supposedly these people like to be treated badly.

This principle that speaks of treating others according to how I want them to treat me, according to what would be good for me, is all very well. But it would be even better if I knew what would be good for me. So that’s how things stand, and we’re interested in turning now to the basis of valid action, and the basis of valid action lies in the register that one obtains from this action.

If I say that I should treat others as I want them to treat me, immediately I may find myself asking, Why should I? But it’s as if there is some internal process or some way in which the mind functions that creates problems inside me when I treat others badly. But what type of function could this be? If I see someone in a very bad state, if I see someone suddenly cut or injured in some way, something resonates inside of me. But how can something that is happening to another person echo *inside of me?* It seems almost magical! It happens that when someone is in an accident, somehow I experience, almost physically, the register of the accident in that other person.

As students of these phenomena, you know that to every perception there corresponds an image, and you understand that there are images that can cause certain points in one’s body to tense up, just as other images can cause them to release tension. If every perception is linked to a representation, and that representation in turn has its register—that is, a new sensation—then it is not so hard to understand how when I perceive a phenomenon there is an internal image that corresponds to that phenomenon. And when that image is mobilized, certain parts of my body or intrabody can experience a corresponding sensation, since they have been modified by the action of that image. I feel “identified” when someone is injured, because the visual perception of that phenomenon is accompanied by the triggering of a visual image and, correlatively, an unleashing of coenesthetic and tactile images. In addition, these images carry with them a new sensation that ends up provoking in me a register of the other’s injury. So it cannot be good for me to treat other people badly, because when I do I have a corresponding register in myself.

Let's look at this almost technically. In order to do that, we'll simulate the functioning of the mental circuits, step by step, even though we know that the structure of the consciousness works as a whole. But for the sake of illustration, we can separate out a "first circuit" that is comprised of the initial perception and its representation, then a re-taking of the representation, and finally an internal sensation. And we can separate out a "second circuit" that has to do with action, whose results might be described as follows: For every action that I launch into the world, I also have an internal register. That feedback is what allows me, for example, to learn things through doing them. If there were no such feedback from the actions I take, I could never perfect them. I learn to type, for example, by repetition; that is to say, it is through trial and error that I record these actions. But I can record actions only through performing them. It is through the doing of actions that I have a register of them.

Here I would like to make a short digression. There is a serious prejudice that at times invades the field of education: the belief that one can learn by *thinking* about things rather than by *doing* them. Clearly, one learns because one has received data, but no datum is simply memorized. It always corresponds to an image, which in turn mobilizes one to new activity: checking, testing against experience, rejecting, and so forth, demonstrating the ceaseless activity of consciousness, not some supposed state of passivity within which the datum somehow resides. This feedback is what allows me to realize, for example, that "I typed the wrong key." As I type, I register the sensation of correctness or the sensation of error. In this way, I gradually perfect the register of correctness, I become more fluent, and little by little the correct way of typing becomes automatic. All of this is related to the "second circuit." The "first circuit" relates to the example of the pain in the other person that I register inside myself, while the "second circuit" relates to the register I have of actions that I perform.

All of you here know the difference between those actions that we call *cathartic* and those that we call *transferential.* Cathartic actions refer basically to the discharge of tensions and go no further than that. Transferential actions, in contrast, allow us to transfer internal charges, to integrate contents, and to facilitate healthy psychic functioning. We know that there will be difficulties for the consciousness when there are mental contents that, like islands, are isolated from one another. If we think in one direction, for example, but feel in another and, finally, act in yet a third, we can see that things won't "fit together" and that the register we obtain will not be one of completeness. It seems that only when we build bridges between our inner contents does psychic functioning become integrated, allowing us to advance a few more steps. There are some very useful transferential techniques that can mobilize and transform problematic images. One example of such techniques is presented in literary form as *guided experiences,* some of which appear in the book *Guided Experiences.*

However, we know that, in addition to the work of images, the actions we carry out are also capable of setting transferential and self-transferential phenomena in motion. But there are actions of different types. Some actions allow us to integrate our internal contents, whereas other actions are terribly disintegrative. There are certain actions that a person never wants to repeat, because they produce such an overcharge of grief, such regret and inner division in the one who performed them. Unfortunately, however, such actions remain strongly linked to that person's past. So, even if the person does not repeat such actions in the future, nonetheless those actions continue pressing from the past, with the consciousness unable to resolve them—unable to translate, transfer, and integrate its contents. As a consequence of all this, the person is prevented from having that sensation of inner growth that we spoke of earlier.

It is not, then, a matter of indifference which actions one carries out in the world. There are actions that give one a register of unity, and there are other actions that give one a register of contradiction and dis-integration. If we study this carefully, in light of what we know about cathartic and transferential phenomena, the matter of one's actions in the world with respect to the effect of those actions on the integration and development of one's contents, will be much clearer. And, of course, all this simulation of circuits we have gone through in order to understand the meaning of *valid action* is part of this complicated subject.

Meanwhile, our friend keeps asking us, "What should I do?" Even if we have only a minimal knowledge of these things, we register it as unifying and worthwhile when, through simple words and deeds, we offer what we know to that disoriented person, who is without references in his or her life. Even if no one else offers help to this person, we make what we have available—as we offer so many other things that allow people to overcome pain and suffering. And in doing so, we will also be working for ourselves.

On the Riddle of Perception

Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island, October 1, 1978

Talk in a Study Group

Two thousand five hundred years ago, in a master class on descriptive psychology, the Buddha—employing a method of registers—addressed one of the most important problems related to perception and to the consciousness that observes perception.

This descriptive type of psychology is very different from the established, official psychology of the West, which works instead with *explanations about* phenomena. If you pick up a typical book on Western psychology, you'll see, I think, how in treating a particular phenomenon, it immediately offers a whole series of explanations about that phenomenon; but with respect to the phenomenon itself, the correct register is never given.

So the explanations of psychological phenomena given by the various psychological currents change, as over the course of time their ideas, hypotheses, and data change, as their knowledge grows or declines. Thus, if we examine a treatise on psychology written a hundred years ago, we will find a number of statements that seem naive and unacceptable by contemporary standards. This type of psychology, with no core or center of its own, depends in large part on the contributions of other sciences. A neurophysiological explanation of the phenomena of consciousness is interesting, and it is certainly an advance. Yet soon we will find ourselves with other, even more complex explanations.

At any rate, in terms of *explanation,* knowledge continues to advance; but in terms of *description* of the phenomena themselves, these explanations neither add nor detract. And yet an accurate description, although it was made twenty-five hundred years ago, allows us to participate in the observation of these mental phenomena in exactly the same way as if that description had been produced today. In the same way, an accurate description developed now is something that will surely serve for a long time to come.

This type of descriptive psychology, dispensing with explanations except when unavoidable, is based on *registers,* which are similar in all people who follow the description. It is as though these descriptions make all human beings, however widely separated in time and space, into contemporaries and compatriots. This type of psychology represents, moreover, a gesture toward uniting all cultures, however different they may be, because it neither lays undue stress on their differences nor tries to impose one culture's particular schema on all other cultures. This type of psychology unites human beings, it doesn't divide them, and is thus a valuable contribution to increasing understanding between peoples.

But let us get down to our subject. It seems that the Buddha was meeting with a group of specialists, and in dialogue form he developed what later came to be known as "The Riddle of Perception."

Suddenly, the Buddha raised his hand and asked one of his principal disciples, "What do you see, Ananda?"

In his customary precise and sober style, the Buddha posed and answered questions. Ananda, in his more exuberant way, replied, "O Noble Lord! I see the hand of the Enlightened One before me as it closes."

"Very good, Ananda. Where do you see the hand, and from where?"

"Oh Master, I see the hand of my noble Lord closing and forming a fist. I see it, of course, outside myself and from myself."

"Very good, Ananda. With what do you see the hand?"

"Of course, Master, I see the hand specifically with my eyes."

"Tell me, Ananda, is the perception in your eyes?"

"Of course it is, Venerable Master."

"And tell me, Ananda, what happens when you close your eyes?"

"Noble Master, when I close my eyes, the perception disappears."

"That, Ananda, is impossible. Are you saying, Ananda, that when this room grows dark, and you gradually see less and less, that your perception is gradually disappearing?"

"Indeed, Master."

"And are you saying, Ananda, that when this room has become totally dark, and yet your eyes are open and you see nothing, that your perception has then disappeared?"

"Oh Noble Master, I am your cousin! Remember that we were educated together and that you loved me greatly when we were young, and so refrain from confusing me!"

"Ananda—if the room grows dark, I do not see the objects in it, but my eyes continue to function. Thus, if my eyes are closed, yet there is light, I see that light pass before me, and if there is total darkness I perceive darkness. Therefore, perception does not disappear because one closes one's eyes. Now tell me, Ananda, if perception is in the eye and you *imagine* that you see my hand, where do you see it?"

"It must be, Lord, that I see your hand by imagining it also from my eye."

"What do you mean, Ananda? That imagination is in the eye? That is not possible. If imagination was in the eye, and you imagined my hand inside your head, you would have to turn your eye back into your head to see the hand that is inside your head. Such a thing is not possible. So you will have to acknowledge that imagination is not in the eye. Where is it, then?"

"It must be," Ananda said, "that neither vision nor imagination is *in* the eye but rather *behind* the eye. And in being behind the eye, when I imagine, then I can see toward the rear, and when I see, when I perceive, then I can see what is before my eye."

"In the second case, Ananda, you would not see objects, but rather see your eye itself…"

And the dialogue continued in this way. But in "The Riddle of Perception," the registers continue to grow more and more complicated, apparent solutions are presented, but stronger and stronger objections are also made. Finally, Ananda, quite unsettled, pleads with the Buddha for a satisfactory explanation of how this whole matter of vision, the imagination, and the consciousness in general works. And though the Buddha is very rigorous in his descriptions, in his explanations he begins to become increasingly roundabout, and that is the way this chapter of the *Surangama Sutra,* one of the most interesting studies in this field, finally closes.

When we hold up our hand, we see our hand outside ourselves, but from inside us. That is, the object appears to us in a different place from the point of observation. If my point of observation were outside, I could have no notion of what I see. Therefore, the point of observation must be inside, not outside, and the object must be outside, not inside. But if I now *imagine* my hand inside my head, both the image and the point of observation are inside. In the first case—the hand I see outside of me from inside of me—it would appear that the point of observation coincides approximately with the eye. In the second case—when the hand is imagined, represented as inside of me—the point of observation clearly does not coincide with my eye, since if I represent the hand inside my head, I can see it looking from my eye inward, or

from the back of my head inward. Obviously, I can also see my hand from above, from below, and from many other points of view. That is, when what is involved is a *representation* and not a *perception,* the point of observation can vary. Therefore, with respect to representation, the point of observation is not fixed in the eye.

If I now imagine my hand, which is in the center of my head, coming out the back of my head, I am still imagining my hand from inside my head, even though I am representing my hand outside of it. One might think that the point of observation at some moment moves outside my head, but, of course, such a thing is not possible. If I imagine myself, for example, looking at myself from a point in front of me, I can represent myself to that-which-looks-at-me from here, from where I am. I can also come to imagine my image as though it were seen from out there, from the point of view of the person who is looking at me. However, even when I place myself, locate myself, in the image of the person who is standing before me, I have the register from me, from where I am. In the same way, I cannot say that when I look at myself in the mirror, I see myself inside the mirror, or I feel myself to be inside the mirror. I am *here* looking at myself *there*, not *there* looking at myself *here*. One can become confused and believe that, because one is standing before the representation of oneself, that *that* is the point of observation, out there—but not even in that case is such a thing possible.

There are experimental situations (a sensory-deprivation tank, for example) where certain perceptual registers are lowered and one loses one's sense of self. And when one loses the sense of self, when one has no reference as to one's tactile boundaries, one may have the impression that one is outside of one's body, and even that one is seeing oneself from the outside. But if you attend to the register carefully, you will observe that it is not that some coenesthetic, tactile projection places the register outside of you, but rather that you have no exact notion of the location of the register because its boundaries have been lost.

Thus, I see my hand outside myself and from myself, or else I see my hand inside myself and also *from* inside myself in the case where I imagine it. While all these examples might appear to involve the same space, there is in fact one space in which the objects that I *perceive* are located and that we could call the *space of perception*. There is another space in which the objects of *representation* are located, which we could call the *space of representation,* and this space is not the same as the space of perception. The objects that are located or positioned in these two different spaces have different characteristics. If I look at my hand, I see that it is at a certain distance from my eye. I see that it is closer to me than some objects and farther away, perhaps, than others. I see that there is a color associated with my hand, with the shape of it. And if I imagine other things around my hand, the perception of my hand will still prevail. Now let me *imagine* my hand. The image of my hand may be in front of an object or behind it. I can change its location in an instant. I can imagine my hand becoming very, very small or make it fill virtually the entire field of my representation. I can change the shape of my hand and its color as well. Thus, the location of a mental object in the space of representation changes in accordance with and depending upon my mental operations, whereas the location of objects in external space, the space of perception, also changes, but independently of my mental operations. For example, if I try to move that stone column over there with my mind, by thinking about it I can do it with respect to representation; but perceptually, no matter how hard I try, the column remains fixed and unchanged. There are, then, great differences between the *represented* object and the *perceived* object. And there are correspondingly great differences between the *space of perception* and the *space of representation.*

Now, however, let's take the case in which I close my eyes and represent my hand. Everything is fine if I represent my hand inside my head. But when I close my eyes and *recall* my hand, which was outside my head, where do I represent my hand now that I am remembering it? Am I representing it as inside my head? No, I represent it as *outside* of my head. And how, when remembering objects I have seen, can I now remember them out there where they were—that is, located in an external space? It is acceptable to say that I locate inside my head the external object that I remember. But what kind of space am I seeing when I remember an object that is not inside my head but rather outside of it (my eyes being closed and therefore not seeing it)? Either the objects that I remember are inside my head and I only think I see them outside it, or when I close my eyes and remember the objects my mind goes outside my internal space and enters that external space. But such a thing is not possible. I can distinguish perfectly well between internal and external objects. I can distinguish perfectly well between the space of perception and the space of representation. But I become more confused about the register when I *represent* the objects in the place where they are and I have *perceived* them—that is, outside of my internal representation.

How do I distinguish between an object that is represented inside my head and an object that is remembered or represented as being outside of my head? I make the distinction because I have a sensation of the boundaries of my head. And what is it that marks these limits? The limits are marked by the tactile sensation, and it is the tactile sensation of my eyes (whether closed or open) that allows me to distinguish whether an object is represented as *inside* or *outside* of me. In this case, the object represented as outside is not necessarily outside, but rather located in the most superficial part of my space of representation, which gives me the register, translated into a visual image, that it is outside. But the difference in the boundaries is tactile, not visual.

So powerful is representation that it can even modify perception. If you look at that curtain there in the back of the room, and you close your eyes and imagine it as being very close to your eyes, you will see that when you open your eyes and look at the real curtain you need some time to adjust your vision, to refocus your eyes. That is, when you imagine that the curtain is very near your eyes, your eyes adjust their focus to the closer, imagined curtain, not to the real one. And conversely, if you close your eyes and imagine that you see a building back there behind the curtain, farther away, and then you open your eyes and look at the curtain again, once again your eyes must adjust their focus. They have to do so because they were incorrectly adjusted, and they became out of focus in this way because your eyes focused in accordance with the image rather than the perception. Then the image—the representation—can modify perception. In this case, the data of perception can be modified considerably depending upon the representation that is present and at work. It may be that our system of representation adjusts to the world in general in a way that is not as precise as we normally believe it to be, especially considering the fact that phenomena situated in the space of representation do not coincide with the phenomena in the space of perception. And knowing that phenomena of representation modify perception, we recognize that under the influence of the system of representation, perception may be altered (in using the word "altered," I am not referring to particular cases of alteration but to perception in general). This has enormous consequences, because if my representation corresponds to a particular system of beliefs, then surely that system of beliefs will modify my vision and my perspective on the external world of perception.

Normally I orient my body in relation to objects through *perception.* But I can also orient my body in relation to objects through *representation.* However, if instead of being represented as

outside of me, an object was represented as inside my head, I would be unable to orient my *actions* toward the object. When I am awake, in vigil, and my eyes are open, my point of observation coincides with my eyes, and not just with my eyes but with my other external senses. But when my level of consciousness falls, my point of observation moves inward. This occurs because, as the level of consciousness falls, the range of perception of the external senses diminishes and the register of the internal senses increases. Therefore, the point from which one observes (which is simply the structure of memory-data and perception-data when external perception-data decrease and internal perception-data increase) now moves inward. As the level of consciousness falls, this point of observation moves inward, thus ensuring that dream images do not unleash their charge and move the body toward the external world. Sleep would do little good in helping the body to rest, to recompose itself, if all the images that arose in my dreams were to trigger activity toward the world. If they did, I would wind up in a state of somnambulism, or in some sort of altered sleep in which I might talk, move, become agitated, or even get up and start to walk around. Indeed, such phenomena do take place if the point from which one views, instead of moving deeper internally, continues following the representations from a more superficial position.

If, while I sleep, the point from which I view things is, because of problems with my internal contents, forced outward toward the periphery, or if because of external stimuli my point of observation is drawn toward the periphery, my images will tend to be located in the most external region of the space of representation. Consequently, they will tend to discharge their signals toward the external world. When one enters deep sleep, one's point of observation falls deeper inside, the images move deeper within one, and the general structure of the space of representation is modified. In other words, when I am awake I look outward from myself but I do not see myself, yet during sleep I often see myself included among the other images.

On occasion, while people are asleep they do not see themselves, but rather see in a way that is similar to the way in which they perceive the world in daily life. This is so because their point of observation is displaced toward the boundaries of the space of representation, in which case their sleep is not quiet or peaceful. But if my point of observation falls inward, then when representing myself in dreams I see myself as though from the outside. And it is not that my images are outside my head, it is that my point of observation has slipped inside, and I observe the "movie" of representation in which I appear as though it were on a screen. I'm not observing the world from myself as when I'm awake; instead, I see myself there, carrying out my activities among the other images. The same thing happens with my oldest memories, of things long past. If you remember yourself at two or three or four years of age, you will not recall yourself as though seeing things *from* yourself, but rather you will see an image of yourself doing things, or among things. With respect to images, the point of observation moves deeper within when remembering events long past, much the same as happens with the representations that occur in deep sleep. This point of observation is none other than my "self." This ego moves, and it situates itself at a greater or lesser depth within the space of representation; it is from the ego, the "I," that the world is observed, that the representations themselves are observed. The ego is variable, and as we have seen in this example it modifies representations and it modifies perceptions.

If I observe my eyes when I represent images that are situated at varying depths, for example when I imagine that I am descending a set of steps into the depths or that I'm ascending a flight of stairs, I will see in the first case that my eyes look down and in the second case that they look up. That is, although they are not looking at any external object and there is

no *need* for their activity, nevertheless my eyes will follow the representations as if they perceived them. If I imagine my house as being in a certain direction, for example, my eyes tend to look in that same direction. And even when they don't, my representation still corresponds to that location in the space of representation. Similarly, if I imagine my house somewhere else, my eyes will look in that direction. The eyes look up and down, left and right, following images or falling upon various objects, and this happens because the systems of impulses from throughout the body feed into that screen of representation observed by the ego. So in a given region of the space of representation there are impulses from a corresponding part of the body, in another region of the space of representation appear impulses from other areas, and so on. And as you may remember, these impulses are continually being translated, distorted, and transformed.

Let's look at an example. In his imagination, our subject begins to descend. He goes down through a sort of tube, and during his descent he suddenly encounters a strong resistance. The resistance turns out to be the head of a large cat, and it prevents him from continuing his descent down the tube. In order to overcome the resistance, in his imagination he strokes his cat's neck, and then suddenly the cat becomes very small. At the same time, our subject registers the release of a tension in his own neck, and now notices that he is able to continue his descent down the tube. That is, in this case the cat is nothing more than the allegorization of the tension in the subject's neck. When a release of tension occurs, that image's system of signals, allegorized as a cat, is modified (i.e., the cat becomes smaller), the resistance decreases, and our friend can continue his descent.

In another case, a subject also begins to descend in his space of representation. Down in the depths, he suddenly encounters a man who gives him a small, black stone. Our friend begins to move upward, coming to what we might call the middle plane—the plane of everyday images of things that are more or less habitual. Here, another man comes along and gives our subject a different object, although it is similar in shape to the object he was given on the lower plane. Our subject continues to ascend to higher levels. He rises above mountains, becoming lost in the clouds, and there he encounters a kind of angel or being of that type who gives him a more radiant, brighter object, though still with characteristics similar to the others he has received. In all three cases, our friend observes the objects in the same relative part of the space of representation. The objects do not appear at one location in the depths, at another location in the middle plane, and at still another location in the heights. Rather, on each of the three planes or levels in which they are present, the objects always appear to our friend in front of him, near the middle of the plane, and a little to the left. And as our friend later understands, this turns out to be related to the fact that he has an artificial vertebra in his back. This vertebra was sending a signal to his internal senses, and that signal was translated consistently as a visual image, although perceived with different attributes depending on the level in the space of representation at which it was found.

Thus, the systems of allegorization transform signals from the intrabody, translating them into images at various locations in the space of representation. It is not that when the eye looks up or down following the images that it does so in order to observe what happens in the intrabody. The eye did not travel down into the esophagus, but rather the signal of the tension came onto the "screen" of representation (in that case, as a cat), without the eye having had to travel to that point. Thus, if I descend in the space of representation, I make contact with translations of signals that come from various levels of the intrabody. Of course, this does not mean that my eye has gradually descended into my intestines and translated what I see there.

As you may remember, as one descends in the space of representation this space grows darker, and as one ascends in the space of representation it grows brighter. This darkness below and brightness above have to do with two phenomena: the increasing or decreasing distance from the visual centers, and the habitual systems of ideation and perception in which we associate such things as the light of the sun with the sky above and the absence of light with lower regions such as caves, watery depths, and things of that kind. This will undoubtedly vary in places where there is typically snow on the ground with a dark sky above, as it is for the inhabitants of cloudy or dark, wintry regions of the world. Of course, there are objects up high that are dark, even when the space of representation is generally more illuminated above, and some bright objects can be found in the depths of the space of representation. And finally, there are limits to both ascending and descending in the space of representation. But that is a topic that would require further descriptions.

We have looked at fourteen cases: The first case dealt with the location of the point of observation with respect to an object outside ourselves; the second, with the point of observation when the object is represented as inside; the third, with the point of observation when it is set behind or elsewhere outside us; the fourth case concerned the false point of observation that appears to be exteriorized when representing oneself from a point of observation in front of oneself; the fifth showed what happened with objects located in the most external part of the space of representation; the sixth dealt with differences in the space of representation when representing things outside and things inside of oneself, these differences being marked by the tactile boundary set by one’s eyes; the seventh point dealt with the modification of perception by representation; in the eighth point, we saw what happens when an object is positioned in one’s internal space and one tries to operate with the body; in the ninth point, we saw the modification of the space of representation when one acts in vigil; the tenth point dealt with the modification of the space of representation when one is in the level of sleep; in point number eleven, we examined what happens with objects that correspond to the internal space; in point number twelve, we spoke about the space of representation and saw that this space arises as a sort of screen and is related to the various areas of the intrabody; in point number thirteen, we saw that as one ascends with one’s images in the space of representation, the space tends to become brighter; finally, in point number fourteen we saw that as one descends with one’s images in the space of representation, this space tends to grow darker, although there are exceptions to both of these cases.

From here, it is possible to draw any number of other consequences.

Meaning of Life

Mexico City, October 10, 1980

Interchange with a Study Group

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to come here today to discuss with you points of view regarding some aspects of our conception of human life. I say *discuss* because this will not be a speech but rather an opportunity to exchange ideas.

Perhaps the first point to discuss is what it is that all our work points to, and specifically the question of whether or not our object of study is the same as that of the sciences.

If our object of study is the same, then science will have the last word. But while our interest focuses on human existence, it is not on human existence as a biological or social fact (there are already sciences dedicated to these questions), but rather human existence as daily register, as one's personal register of everyday life. When people do research into the social and historical phenomenon that are constitutive of the human being, the questions they ask in such studies are inevitably formulated based on their own daily lives, on their situations, moved by their desires, their anguish, their needs, and shaped by their loves and hates, their frustrations and successes. In short, their questions originate from something prior to statistics and theorizing—they originate from life itself.

What is it that is common to all humankind and at the same time particular to each human existence? The search for happiness and the desire to overcome pain and suffering are common to all human beings and yet particular to each individual human existence. This is a truth that can be registered by each and every human being.

Well then, what is this happiness to which the human being aspires? This happiness is whatever the human being *believes* it to be. This statement, while perhaps surprising, is based on the fact that people orient themselves toward different ideas or images of happiness. In fact, the ideal of happiness changes with people's historical, social, and personal situations. From this we can conclude that human beings seek what they believe will make them happy and, correspondingly, what they believe will keep suffering and pain at bay.

With the aspiration to happiness, the resistances of pain and suffering arise. How can these resistances be overcome? First, we need to ask ourselves about the nature of these phenomena.

In our view of things, *pain* is a physical fact. All of us have, or have had, experiences of pain. It is a sensory, corporal fact. Hunger, natural hardships, sickness, old age—all produce pain. We make a clear distinction between this type of pain and other phenomena that have nothing to do with the sensory. Only the advance of society and science can make pain recede. And the eradication of pain is precisely where scientists and social reformers—and above all peoples themselves, who generate the progress that sustains these scientists and social reformers—can most productively expend their efforts.

Suffering, on the other hand, is mental. It is not a sensory fact in the same way that pain is. Frustration and resentment are also states that we have all experienced, yet they cannot be localized in any specific organ or combination of organs. Is it possible that even though they are of different natures, pain and suffering somehow interact? Certainly, pain also gives rise to

suffering. In that sense, social progress and the advance of science can make this one aspect of suffering recede. But where, specifically, will we find the solution to how to make suffering itself recede? We will find it through *meaning in life.* There is no reform, no scientific advance, that can cause the suffering produced by frustration, resentment, fear of death, or fear in general to recede.

Meaning in life is a direction toward the future that gives coherence to life, that provides a framework for all of one's activities, that justifies one's life fully. In the light of meaning, suffering in general and even pain in its mental component retreat and grow smaller as one comes to understand them as experiences that can be surpassed.

What, then, are the sources of human suffering? They are the factors that produce *contradiction*. One suffers when one lives in a contradictory situation, but one also suffers when one remembers past contradictory situations or imagines such situations in the future.

These sources of suffering have been called the *three pathways of suffering,* and they can be modified in accordance with the individual's state with respect to meaning in life. But before speaking about meaning in life and its significance in our lives, we need to briefly examine these three pathways.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

It is clear, for example, that just as there are sciences that study stars or microorganisms, there is the science of sociology that studies human groups. And from their various perspectives, biology, anatomy, and physiology study the human body, just as psychology studies the behavior of the psyche. But those who engage in such studies, the scholars and scientists in these fields, do not study their own immediate existences. There is no science through which one studies one's own existence. Science says nothing about the situation, for example, in which a woman finds herself when, upon arriving home, she has a door slammed in her face and is treated badly, or instead, perhaps, receives a caress.

And this is precisely where our interest lies, in the situation of *human existence,* and thus the discussions proper to the sciences lie outside our area of competence. At the same time, we note that science has serious drawbacks, serious difficulties, when it comes to defining what happens in human existence. What is the nature of human life with respect to meaning, the nature of suffering and pain, the nature of happiness, the nature of the search for happiness? These are the objects of our study, of our interest. From this point of view, it might be said that we have a *position* vis-à-vis existence, a position with respect to life, rather than that we are a science that deals with these things.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

We have focused on what people search for, what people believe happiness to be. But the point is that today one may believe happiness is one thing, while tomorrow one may believe it is something else. If we examine our own experience—what we thought happiness was when we were twelve, for example, and what we think it is today—we will notice the change in our perspective. Similarly, if we consult ten people, we will see a wide diversity of points of view about what people believe will make them happy. In the Middle Ages, people had a general idea of happiness that was very different from the ideas held during the Industrial Revolution. And in general, the idea of happiness varies for different peoples, cultures, and individuals. Indeed, nothing is at all clear when it comes to the object of happiness. Apparently, such an object does not exist—it is more like a mood that is being sought than some tangible object.

At times this is confused in certain advertising that presents a bar of soap, for instance, as happiness itself. Naturally, we all understand that in fact this is an attempt to describe a state,

the state of happiness, and not an object, because as we know such an *object* does not exist. Not that it is at all clear what the *state* of happiness is either. It's something that has never been satisfactorily defined; it's as if there has been some sort of swindle that's left people with nothing clear about all this. Well, then, unless there's another question, let's go on.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

The question that's just been asked has to do with the progress made in overcoming pain and overcoming suffering. How is it that while the advance of science and society lead to overcoming pain, there seems to be no parallel way in which suffering is overcome?

There are those who hold that the human being has not advanced at all. However, it is obvious that in terms of scientific conquest, in terms of mastery of nature, and in terms of material development, the human being has indeed progressed. Of course, different civilizations have not developed to equal levels; but despite the fact that problems of all kinds remain, human beings and human civilization have certainly advanced—that is obvious. Consider how in the past, a certain bacteria would wipe out entire populations, while today the prompt administration of medical care can solve the problem. At one point, half of Europe succumbed to a plague. Today, we have moved beyond that, and while humanity continues to fight both old and new diseases, it is certain that with the passage of time more and more diseases will be overcome.

Things have changed, and changed a great deal. It is clear, however, that with respect to the *mental suffering* we have been discussing, someone five thousand years ago and someone today register and suffer disappointments inside themselves in the same way, register and suffer fears, register and suffer resentments in the same way. They register and suffer these things as though for them history did not exist, as though in this regard every human being was the same as the first human being. While *pain* continues to be pushed back by the progress of civilization, *suffering* in the human being has not changed—there have been no satisfactory responses with respect to suffering. And in this sense, there is something unequal in the conquest of pain, on the one hand, and suffering on the other. Yet how can we say that the human being has not progressed? Perhaps humanity has advanced sufficiently that today we are asking and attempting to answer this kind of question—a question that in earlier times would probably not have been necessary to ask.

Let us now return to the subject of the three pathways of suffering, which are pathways that are necessary for human existence, but whose normal functioning has become distorted. Let me try to explain.

The sensation of what I am now living and perceiving, the memory of what I have lived, and the imagining of what I might someday live—these three pathways are necessary to human existence. Cut off one or more of these functions, and existence becomes disarticulated. Do away with our memories, and we lose the ability even to manage our own bodies. Eliminate sensation, and we lose all self-regulation. Take away our imagination, and we will not be able to orient ourselves in any direction at all. Yet these three pathways, so necessary for life, can become distorted in their functioning, can then become enemies of life, carriers of suffering. Indeed, we suffer every day because of things that we perceive, things that we remember, and things that we imagine.

On other occasions, I have said that we suffer when we live in contradictory situations, such as when we want to do two things that are mutually opposed. We also suffer because we fear that in the future we will not obtain what we desire or that we will lose what we have. And certainly we suffer because of what we have lost or what we have not been able to achieve. We

suffer now over what we once experienced: that punishment, that betrayal, that injustice, that humiliation, that shame, that physical pain that itself is past. And we live with the ghosts of the past as though they were events still happening today. These things, which are the sources of our anger, resentment, and frustration, condition and close off our future and cause us to lose faith in ourselves.

Let's discuss the problem of the *three pathways of suffering.*

If these three pathways—perception, memory, and imagination—make life itself possible, how is it, then, that they become distorted? If we assume that people seek happiness, it would seem reasonable to expect that they would learn to manage these three pathways in their favor. So how is it that these three pathways can suddenly become precisely their own worst enemies?

Apparently, when the consciousness of the human being first began to expand, at a time when the human being was not yet a very well defined being at all—apparently at that moment, as the imagination expanded, as memory and the recollection of history opened up into a wider horizon, as perception of the world in which human beings lived was amplifying, at the same time that these functions were expanding, corresponding resistances arose. That is how things work with internal functions. Much as we encounter resistance whenever we try any new physical movement, any new activity, for the first time, we see that resistance is also found in nature itself. From the moment that it rains, and the rain falls to the earth, and the water flows into the river, the water encounters resistances in its path—though in surmounting those resistances, those obstacles, the water finally reaches the sea.

As human beings grow and develop, they continually encounter resistances in much the same way. And in encountering and overcoming these resistances they become stronger; and as they become stronger they integrate difficulties; and as they integrate these difficulties, they surpass them. Thus, all the suffering that has arisen in the course of human development has also helped the human being to become stronger than that suffering. So it is that past suffering has contributed to human development, in the sense that it has helped to create precisely the conditions to surpass that suffering.

We do not aspire to suffering. Moreover, we wish to reconcile with our species, which has endured so much suffering, thanks to which humankind has been able to achieve new advances. The suffering of primitive humankind has not been in vain; the suffering of generation upon generation—limited by the conditions of their times—has not been in vain. Our gratitude goes out to those who have preceded us, because despite their suffering it is thanks to them that we can now attempt new liberations.

The point is that suffering did not appear all at once, but rather with the development and expansion of humankind. And clearly, as human beings we do not wish to continue suffering but rather to move on, to break through these resistances, to integrate them, and to forge a new path in the continuing process of our human development.

We have said that it is through *meaning in life* that we will discover the solution to the problem of suffering, and we have defined this meaning as one's direction toward the future, a direction that gives coherence, that provides a framework for one's activities and fully justifies existence. This direction toward the future is of the greatest importance, because if, as we have noted, the path of imagination, of project, of future, is cut off, then human existence loses direction, and this becomes an inexhaustible source of suffering.

It is clear that for everyone death looms as the greatest future suffering. From this perspective, people can see that life has the character of something provisional, and therefore

in this context that all human construction is useless, leading only to nothingness. This is why, perhaps, that turning their gaze away from the fact of death has made it possible to “change” life and to make it as if death did not exist… Those who believe that everything will end with death can make themselves feel better by thinking that they will be remembered for their splendid good works, or that their loved ones, or even future generations, will never forget them. But even should that be true, we all march finally toward an absurd nothingness that will interrupt all memory.

There are also those who think that all one does in life is to respond to needs as best one can. Well, soon enough those needs will end in death, and the struggle to escape the rule of necessity will have lost all meaning. Some might say that an individual’s personal life lacks importance in the life of all humankind, and that therefore an individual death has no significance. If that were the case, then neither one’s life nor one’s individual actions would have any significance, any meaning. There would be no justification for any law or any commitment, and there would be, in essence, no great difference between good actions and bad ones.

Nothing has any meaning if everything ends with death. And if everything ends with death, the only recourse for making it through life is to seek solace in provisional meanings, provisional directions to which we can apply our energy and our action. That is in fact what generally occurs; but in order for that to happen, one must constantly negate the fact of death—one must act as if death did not exist.

If you ask people what meaning life has for them, they will probably tell you that meaning in life is related to their families, or other people, or humanity, or some cause that, according to them, justifies their existence. And those provisional meanings will give them a direction and enable them to face life. But when problems arise with their loved ones, when they become disillusioned with that cause they embraced, when something changes with respect to that meaning they have chosen, then absurdity and disorientation will return to claim their prey.

Lastly, the problem with those provisional meanings in life, those provisional directions, is that if they are achieved they are lost as references, they lose their value for the future. And if they are not achieved, in that case, too, they lose their value as references. Of course, after the failure of one provisional meaning, there always remains the alternative of adopting a new provisional meaning, perhaps one opposite to the one that failed. As the years go by, then, people go from meaning to meaning, all traces of coherence obliterated, and in doing so they increase their contradictions and thus their suffering.

Life has no meaning if everything ends with death. But is it true that everything ends with death? Is it true that one cannot achieve a definitive direction in one’s life, a direction that will not be turned aside by the accidents of life? How can human beings position themselves to face the problem of everything ending with death? Let’s examine this question, but first let’s discuss what we have seen so far.

(Break and discussion.)

Just as we noted that there are three pathways of suffering, we also observe five states associated with the problem of death and transcendence. Every person can be found in one of these five states.

There is a state in which a person has indisputable evidence of transcendence, arrived at not through education or surroundings, but through the person’s own experience. For such people, it is completely clear that life is only a transition and death the merest accident.

Others believe that the human being will go on to a state of transcendence of some kind, and this belief comes from their education and their surroundings, and not from something that

they *feel* or have experienced. This is not something evident to them, but rather they believe it because it is what they have been taught and have accepted without any experiential basis.

There is a third way of locating oneself with respect to meaning in life, and it is present in those people who *want* to have an experience of faith or certainty of meaning. You must have encountered those who say, “If only I could believe in something, have that certainty, it would change my life.” We can find many examples of this—of people who have suffered misfortunes and have overcome them, either because they have faith or because they have a register that these difficulties, because they are transitory or provisional, are not all there is to life but instead are simply a test, a resistance or obstacle, that in some way makes them grow in knowledge. You can even find people who accept suffering as a tool for learning. It is not that they seek out suffering—unlike those who seem to have a special taste for suffering. We are talking about people who, simply, when something bad happens, take the best from it, not people who go around looking for ways to suffer, but rather those who, finding themselves in a situation of suffering, assimilate it, integrate it, and surpass it.

Very well, so there are people who locate themselves in this state: They have no faith, they have no belief, but they have a *desire* to believe—they *wish* they had something to encourage them and give direction to their lives. Yes, these people exist.

There are still others who suspect, intellectually, that there may, perhaps, be a future beyond death, that some sort of transcendence could exist. They believe that this is possible, although they have had no experience of transcendence nor do they have any sort of faith, nor do they aspire to have that experience or that faith. You will also encounter people in this state.

There is, finally, a fifth state, which corresponds to those who deny any possibility of transcendence. You will also find people in this state, and even among you it is possible that many think in this way.

So we see that, with variations, each person can locate him or herself among those who have evidence of transcendence and for whom it is indisputable; or among those who have faith because they were taught to have faith when they were young; among those who *wish* they had that experience or that faith; or among still others who consider it to be an intellectual possibility but don’t give it much further thought; or finally among those who deny any possibility whatever of transcendence.

But we have not yet come to the end of this point regarding how one locates oneself with respect to the problem of transcendence. Clearly, there are also different *depths* in this matter of locating oneself regarding continuity or transcendence. There are those who say that they have faith, who affirm this, but what they say does not really correspond with what they experience. We are not saying that these people are lying; we simply mean that they say this superficially. Today they say that they have faith, but tomorrow they may no longer have it. And so we observe different degrees of profundity in these five positions, and thus in the shakiness or firmness of people’s convictions with respect to what they affirm. We have known people who were devout, who were believers in a faith, but then, when a family member died, when a loved one died, all the faith that they said they had disappeared, and they fell into the most profound state of non-meaning. That faith was a superficial faith, a peripheral faith, the vestiges of faith. On the other hand, quite the opposite occurs for those who suffer terrible catastrophes, and yet continue to affirm and even strengthen their faith.

And then we have known other people who were absolutely convinced that transcendence did not exist. You die and you disappear and that’s it. In a manner of speaking, these people had faith that everything ends with death. Of course, once in a while, walking past a cemetery

on a dark night, some may have walked a little faster and felt a little uneasy… and how is this compatible with their absolute conviction that everything ends with death? So there are people who, even in their negation of transcendence, are superficial, are not firmly in this state.

One can find oneself in any of these states, and also at various depths within a state. At certain times in our lives, we may have believed one thing about transcendence, and at another time something else. Our belief may have changed not only at various times in our lives but also in response to different situations—it is something mobile, not something static. Our belief with respect to the problem of transcendence can change; it can even change from one day to the next. Sometimes in the morning I believe one thing, but by the afternoon I believe something else. And this is clearly of the greatest importance, because it means that the orientation of human life is excessively variable. And in the end, it brings confusion and disharmony to our daily lives.

Thus, the human being can be located in one or another degree of one of these five states. But what is the *correct* location? Does one exist, or are we simply describing problems without giving a solution? Are we able to suggest what is the best position from which to face this problem?

Some people say that we either have faith or we don't; that faith either arises in us or it doesn't. But let's look more closely at that state of consciousness. Someone can have absolutely no faith at all, yet at the same time can *want* to attain it. This person can even understand, intellectually, that such a thing would be interesting, that it might be worthwhile to orient him or herself in the direction of having faith. Well, then, when that begins to happen, it is because something within the person is already moving, already expressing itself in that new direction.

Those who achieve that faith or that transcendent experience—even if they cannot define it in precise terms, as one cannot precisely define love—will recognize the need to orient others toward meaning in life, though never do they try to impose their own landscape on those who do not recognize it.

And so, coherently with everything that has been said, I declare before all of you my faith and my certainty of experience that death does not stop the future, that death on the contrary modifies the provisional state of our existence to launch it toward immortal transcendence. And I do not impose my certainty or my faith upon anyone, and I live in harmony with those who find themselves in different states with respect to meaning in life. But I am obliged in solidarity to offer this message—a message that I recognize makes the human being happy and free. For no reason will I evade my responsibility to express my truths, though they may seem doubtful to those who experience the provisional nature of life and the absurdity of death.

Furthermore, though I clearly define my own position with respect to this point, I never ask others about their personal beliefs. And I proclaim the freedom of all human beings to believe or not to believe in God and the freedom to believe or not to believe in immortality.

And so, among the thousands upon thousands of men and women who, shoulder to shoulder, work with us in solidarity, there are atheists and believers, people with doubts and people with certainties, and none of them are asked about their faith. Instead, everything is given as an orientation that may help each of them decide for themselves the path that best makes clear the meaning of their lives.

It is less than courageous to refrain from proclaiming one's truths, but it is unworthy of true solidarity to try to impose them upon others.

The Volunteer

Mexico City, October 11, 1980

Comments During a Break in a Study Group

It appears that many of the people who are active in our Movement share a certain history—they have a background as volunteers, although this is not the same as believing in volunteerism. It seems that many are social workers, nurses, and teachers. That is, they are people about whom one can say that while they do their jobs and are paid for them, their wages are in no way their complete compensation. Of course, if they are seriously underpaid, they are going to protest just like anyone else, but the basic orientation of their activities does not end in themselves, but instead is turned outward toward others. After that comes the need to be paid and take care of daily necessities, which is only natural, of course—they can't live on air!

What can we learn from these people who, though typically underpaid, have that strong urge to teach others*?* And what of these others, social workers and the rest, who carry out activities where the rewards are not obvious? It seems that there are a lot of people in our Movement who have had experiences of this sort—people who set up groups in their neighborhoods, or who when they were young organized sports teams of one kind or another, the kind of people who get things moving. While many who come to our Movement are like this, others are not—they come in other ways, for other reasons, and only a little later do they come to understand the significance of these works, and then they, too, in their way begin to participate.

So it is that many people become active when our work gives them a meaning, gives them an inner justification. They start by following the tendency they already had, drawing in part on the experience of things they have done previously. One can easily observe this sort of participation; there are many examples. I don't know how things are here in Mexico, but I have seen these characteristics in many of our friends in the Movement all over the world. They tend to be, in general, the kind of people who get things moving. Generally their biographies demonstrate those kinds of experiences.

But why do some people do things without looking for any immediate return from their disinterested action? How can that be? What is it that they do in their heads that allows them to act in such a strange way? From the point of view of today's consumer societies, it is a very atypical way of going about things. All who are born, raised, and educated today have been affected by the impact of propaganda of a consumer structure, and thus they tend to see the world in terms of feeding themselves.

Let me try to explain what I mean. I am a consumer; therefore, I have to consume—to swallow—more and more things. I am a kind of enormous belly that must be filled up. Not for a moment do I entertain the idea or the register that something should come *from* me. Quite the contrary, I find it all too easy to say, "Enough comes from me already, so I have every right to these consumer goods. Don't I put in long hours at the office, don't I give up my time—which I'd prefer to dedicate entirely to consuming—don't I pay with all that time when I'm working for the system and not consuming?" Indeed, it's a good argument. In various ways people exchange hours of work for remuneration. Isn't that so? But where is the emphasis placed? People do not focus on the activity that they carry out in the world. They consider that activity a necessary evil

that is unavoidable in order for the circuit to come back around full circle to themselves again. That is the way today's systems, under one banner or another, are set up. It always comes down to the same thing: being a consumer.

The entire populace is becoming neurotic, which is only logical considering that in reality, just as there is one circuit in a person for things to enter, there is another for things to go out. And if we close off the exit circuit, the circuit that goes out, the person is going to have problems. But the fact is that most people are locked into this pattern of exclusively receiving. And as this ideology of receiving spreads, people are less and less able to understand, even to consider, how there are some people who do things for which they receive little or nothing in return. From the point of view of the consumer ideology, such behavior is extremely suspicious. What would lead a person to do things without receiving any corresponding compensation? What motive could this person possibly have? What this suspicion really betrays, however, is an abysmal lack of understanding of the human being. Today, people tend to understand utility only in terms of money, while knowing nothing of the existence of life-utility, of psychological utility. There will always be someone who is "living well," without any job problems, without any health problems or problems of aging or retirement, with all these things completely resolved. Nevertheless, inexplicably, this person jumps out a window, or becomes an alcoholic and spends all day in a drunken haze, or takes drugs, or one day ends up killing a neighbor.

In contrast, our Movement publicly defends this behavior of disinterested giving, of giving without self-interest, which others disdain. We defend the man who springs out of bed because the house next door is on fire. He throws on his clothes, puts on a helmet, runs over, and puts out the fire. And when he returns home (at six o'clock in the morning, singed, smelling of smoke, bruised), the wife he dearly loves starts throwing china and saying, "How much do they pay you for that? You're going to be late to work and get us in trouble and have big problems at home, too, because of these crazy ideas of yours!" And when he walks down the street, people point at him and say, "There's that volunteer fireman." He's a kind of village idiot to those who feel so good about themselves that they jump out of windows. Normally, volunteer firemen don't jump out of windows.

That is, in their own way, empirically, such people have found a way to apply their energies in the world. These volunteers are able to do something more than launch themselves, cathartically, into certain activities (the way other people throw themselves into sports, into games, into so many other activities). They do something much more important than what most people do: *They express an inner meaning out into the world.* And when they do this, they carry out an *empirically transferential function.* They are not responding to conventional stimuli, they are *composing* meanings that go out from themselves toward the world. Those people who start with their inner world and express it in the external world are very different from people who are obliged to do certain things, and after doing them are remunerated. In the first case, such people voluntarily shape the contents within themselves in ways that may not be altogether clear, even for them, although they may try to express them with words like "solidarity," perhaps even without understanding the deeper meaning of that word. Our poor volunteer fireman may, each time he returns home to rebukes and flying china, even wind up thinking that he really is some sort of fool, and conclude that "something must be wrong with me because this kind of thing always keeps happening to me." And if the volunteer is a woman, it's even worse—in this society, much worse.

So in the end, these volunteers wind up humiliated, feeling bad about themselves, and eventually giving in, assimilating into the system, because no one has ever explained to them

how all of this works. They know they're different from other people, but they can't quite understand why that is. And if we go to them and say, "Come on, then, explain what you get out of all this," they stammer and shrug their shoulders as though they had been asked to explain something almost shameful. No one has ever made it clear to them, no one has ever given them the tools to understand why they turn that enormous potential they have within themselves out into the world, without expectation of personal gain. And after all, it *is* quite extraordinary.

Public Talk in Madrid

Sports Pavilion, Madrid, September 27, 1981

Note: At the invitation of the Community for Human Development in various countries, Silo took part in a tour during which he spoke at a number of public events. His speeches were accompanied by those of his friends Bittiandra Aiyyappa, Saki Binudin, Petur Gudjonsson, Nicole Myers, Salvatore Puledda, and Daniel Zuckerbrot. Since the core of the ideas presented by Silo in this talk in Madrid was repeated at similar events in Barcelona, Reykjavik, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Milan, Colombo, Paris, and Mexico City, in this anthology we have included only those speeches given in Madrid and Bombay

Some time ago I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” And so I explained. Later, others said, “You don’t have the right to explain your thinking.” So I kept silent. Twelve years passed, and once again I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” So once more I will speak, knowing beforehand that again I will be told: “You do not have the right to explain your thinking.”

I said nothing new on that first occasion; I’ll say nothing new today.

But what was said then? I said: Without inner faith, there is fear; fear produces suffering; suffering produces violence; violence produces destruction. Therefore, inner faith prevents destruction.

Today our friends have spoken about fear, suffering, violence, and nihilism as the principal examples of this destruction. They have also spoken about faith in oneself, in others, and in the future. They have said that we must modify the destructive course that events are taking by changing the *direction* of human actions. In addition, and most fundamentally, they have told us how to do all this—so I will be adding nothing new today.

I simply want to make three observations: the first with respect to the right that we have to explain our point of view; the second regarding how our world has reached this situation of total crisis; and, lastly, what it is that will allow us to make an immediate resolution and change the direction of our lives. This resolution should conclude with a commitment by every person who agrees with what is said here today.

All right, then, what right do we have to explain our point of view and to act accordingly? In the first place, we have the right to diagnose the current ills according to our understanding, even though our judgment may not agree with the established view of things. In that sense, we say that no one has the right to silence new interpretations by claiming to possess the absolute truth. As for our activities, why should some find them offensive, when we do not interfere with their activities? And if in any place in the world what we say or do is silenced or distorted, we can say that there we find bad faith, absolutism, and lies. Why not let the truth run free and allow freely informed people to choose what is reasonable for their own lives?

Well then, why do we do what we do? I will answer very briefly: We do it as a supreme moral act, and our morality is based on this principle: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” If, as individuals, we want the best for ourselves, we are required by that moral imperative to give our best to others as well. And who are these “others”? Others are those closest to me, and it is there with them that my real possibilities of giving and changing things lie. And if my possibilities

of giving and changing things should span the world, then the whole world will be “those closest to me.” But it would be absurd for me to busy myself proclaiming my concern for the whole world if my real possibility for changing things reached only as far as my next-door neighbor. That is why there is a minimum requirement in our moral action, and that is for each person to act and to explain things in his or her immediate surroundings. And it is contrary to our morality *not* to act in the world but instead to remain suffocated in a dead-end individualism. This moral imperative gives precise direction to our actions and also clearly indicates toward whom those actions are directed.

When we speak of morality, we refer to a free act, to the possibility of freely acting or not acting, and we say that this act is beyond all necessity and beyond all mechanicity. This is our free act, our moral act: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” No theory, no justification, is above this free and moral act. It is not *our* morality that is in crisis. It is other moralities that are in crisis, not ours. Our morality is not in reference to things or objects or systems—our morality refers to the *direction* of human actions. All the criticism we offer, all the communication we provide or attempt to transmit, is oriented to the *direction of human actions.*

There is another point that I should touch on, and it refers to the state of crisis that we find around us. How did all this come about, and who is to blame for it? I will not make a conventional analysis of this. There will be no science, no statistics. Instead, I will offer my answer in images that can reach the heart of every individual.

After an immense period of time had passed, human life began to flower on this planet. But with the passage of millennia, the peoples and the nations began to grow separate and distinct. There was a time to be born, a time to laugh, a time to suffer, and a time to die. Individuals, peoples, and nations, building and growing, succeeding one another until at last they inherited the Earth. They ruled the waters of the oceans and flew faster than the wind, and they crossed the mountains. And in voices of the storm and with light brighter than the sun, they demonstrated their power. Then they looked back and saw in the distance their blue planet, their gentle protector, veiled by clouds.

What energy has moved all this activity, what motor has propelled the human being through history, if not rebellion against death? From earliest times, death has dogged humankind’s footsteps like a shadow. And since ancient times, death has found its way into the human heart and tried to conquer it. What was at first an unrelenting struggle driven by the necessities of life became a struggle driven by fear and desire. And two roads opened: the road of Yes and the road of No. At that point, all thought, all emotion, and all action became torn by doubt over whether to choose the Yes or the No. “Yes” created everything that allowed humankind to surpass suffering. “No” added suffering to pain. There was no person, no relationship, no organization free of its internal Yes and its internal No. Then the separate peoples and nations began to connect one to another, until at last the civilizations came together, and the Yes and the No of every language was heard simultaneously in the farthest corners of the Earth.

How will human beings ever triumph over their shadow? By fleeing it? By confronting it in incoherent struggle? If the motor of history is rebellion against death, I say to you now: Rebel against frustration and revenge! For the first time in history, let us stop looking for people to blame. Everyone is *responsible* for what they have done, but no one is to *blame* for what has happened. If only with this universal judgment we could declare: “No one is to blame,” and with this establish a moral obligation that every human being reconcile with his or her own past. This will begin here today in you, and you will be responsible to see that it continues, reaching those around you until it has spread to the last corner of the Earth.

If the direction of your life has not changed, you need to change it. And if it has already changed, then you need to strengthen this new direction. So that all this may be possible, accompany me in a free, courageous, and profound act that is also a commitment to reconciliation. Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation. Let me repeat this: Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation.

For everyone, Peace, Force, and Joy!

Talk at an Agricultural Collective

Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 20, 1981

An Interchange with the Buddhist Sangha in Sarvodaya

Greetings to the Sangha, to the brothers, sisters, and elders, and to all of you here today. Doctor Ariyaratne has been too kind and has spoken of us in terms that are too lofty.

Truly, since coming to this center, we have been impressed by the sobriety and the value of the work being carried out here. We have often spoken of *humanizing the Earth,* but this is something that must be carried out in practice. Humanizing the Earth can too often remain nothing more than an idea, but here we have seen that humanizing the Earth is put into practice. We have seen, above all else, a moral force in action. This contrasts with what we see today in all latitudes, where the Earth is being dehumanized and the world is becoming dehumanized.

I come from an agricultural region, and in recent years I have witnessed how the countryside has become depopulated as its people have concentrated in the cities. I have witnessed how the family that once existed has been gradually destroyed and the elder generation cast aside. The countryside has been abandoned, and the cities have swelled, gathering around them zones of people trapped in poverty. If the numbers given to us by the United Nations are correct, in 1950 half the world's population lived in rural areas and the other half in cities, towns, or villages. If present statistical trends continue, it appears that by the year 2000 more than 90 percent of all the working men and women on the Earth will live in cities. This will have consequences that will be, from every point of view, explosive.

The work that we have seen in Sarvodaya and its social organizations, the decentralization that has been accomplished, the creation of compact agricultural centers in the countryside, is an idea that holds out a new possibility for the world. Of course, the question remains whether the new generations will be able to make their lives in centers like those proposed here, in which health care, education, and the possibility of work for all are right at hand, where even cultural and university centers can be established in rural areas.

The worldwide process we are witnessing today is one of continuing concentration in cities. Everywhere we see urban concentration, the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, concentration in every sense of the word. Apparent decentralizations are in fact simply breaks with the old order and lead only to concentrations at another level. Nation states disintegrate only to re-concentrate into larger parastates; as centralized businesses disintegrate, multinational corporations and financial capital only become stronger. It seems that nothing is centrifugal, but everything is centripetal. Everything concentrates, and the apparent de-concentrations are simply steps in the breakup of the old frameworks, which then become incorporated into even greater concentrations.

More and more the human being is being transformed into a consumer. Today, people think that everything begins and ends in them, that everything pertains to them alone. Here in Sarvodaya, new ideas and new behavior are being proposed, and a new direction is being demonstrated that is opposite to the prevailing, selfish direction. Here in Sarvodaya there is no question of viewing the human being as a consumer; here you are trying to meet the basic

needs of life. Here you are trying to distribute and decentralize, and to bring culture into the countryside. Here it is clear that you are trying to reverse this compulsive process of concentration that has swallowed up today's world. It is of the utmost importance to understand this experience which, independent of any success it may have in the future, is a valid action in and of itself. Furthermore, I believe I have understood the vision of the human being and of society that is taking visible shape here in Sarvodaya. Here it seems that a person is not considered an isolated being but is viewed instead within the sphere of social relations. Underlying all this is the idea of compassion, the idea of action that does not end in oneself but rather extends to the other person. I believe I have seen that the concern here is less with the suffering one might be going through *oneself* than with the suffering of the *other.*

This is precisely the point of view that we in our Movement have long maintained. We say that problems are not resolved within the consciousness of a single person; we say that one must leap over one's own problems and go to the pain of the other person. That is the moral act *par excellence:* "Treat others as you want them to treat you."

There are those who think that they have a great many personal problems, and that because they have so many problems, they can do nothing for others. This is quite extraordinary, but in the West one sees people with a very high standard of living who nevertheless find it impossible to help others, because they believe that they themselves have too many problems. And yet we have seen how the poorest part of the population—those who suffer real hardships and face enormous problems—are still able to direct themselves toward others, are able to share their food, are able to leap over their own suffering in repeated acts of solidarity.

Here we have seen that same moral force, but organized and expanding—this force that goes toward others and makes us better in the measure that we help others overcome their suffering. We have been here only a short while, and yet we have looked deep into the eyes of the children who have found refuge from the street. We have seen the smiles and the conduct of those who work here, and we have realized that behind all this, once again, is that moral force in motion.

This is a great social movement, or rather spiritual movement, but I would define it as a great *moral force* in motion. This is the impression I would communicate from what I have seen so far in Sarvodaya, but I would also say that I would need more time in order to learn from all that is being done here.

Thank you for your kind attention.

"We would like to hear your message. In Theravada Buddhism, sila *is the moral rule that leads to right action. Please explain, please make your moral rule explicit."*

Reverend, my message is simple and applicable in everyday life. It is a message directed toward the individual and his or her immediate surroundings. It is not a message directed toward the world in general. It is directed toward people who love, live, and suffer in the company of their husbands or wives, their companions in life, their families, friends, and coworkers—in the company of those right around them.

The world faces many critical problems, but it is exaggerated of me to focus on changing the whole world if it is not within my real possibilities to do so. The only thing I can change is my immediate surroundings, and in some way change myself. And if my possibilities for action and transformation should reach further than that, in that case my neighbors will include more people, more than my loved ones, my friends, and those I work with.

We say that one must have an awareness of one's own limitations in order to carry out an action that is both wise and effective. Therefore, everywhere we go we propose that people form small groups, each consisting of the individual and his or her immediate human surroundings. These groups, whether urban or rural, gather together all those volunteers who want to leap over their own problems in order to direct themselves to others. As these small groups grow, they connect among one another, and their possibilities for transformation also grow.

What is the basis for the growth of these groups? What is it that unifies them? They are based on the idea that *it is better to give than to receive*—on the idea that every act that ends in oneself generates contradiction and suffering, and on the idea that actions that end in others are the only acts that make it possible to surpass one's own suffering.

It is not wisdom alone that allows a person to overcome his or her own suffering. There can be right thought and right intention, but right action can be missing. And there is no right action that is not inspired by compassion. This basic human attitude of compassion, this notion that human action should go toward others, is the basis of all individual and social growth.

As you know, these things have been said for many, many years, and so I am saying nothing new here. I am only trying to make people aware that this self-enclosure, this individualism, this turning of action back in upon oneself, is producing a total disintegration in the men and women of today. Nevertheless, it seems that in many places even such simple ideas are not easily understood. And lastly, there are many people who think that closing themselves up in their own problems at least avoids new difficulties. Of course, this is not true. In fact, what generally occurs is the contrary—personal contradiction spreads, contaminating one's immediate surroundings.

When I speak of *contradiction,* I am speaking of acts that are harmful to oneself. I betray myself when I *do* things opposed to what I *feel.* That creates permanent suffering in me, and that suffering does not remain in me alone—it contaminates all those around me. This apparently individual suffering that arises out of personal contradiction winds up becoming social suffering.

There is only one act that allows the human being to break with his or her contradiction and permanent suffering. This is the moral act in which human beings direct themselves toward others in order to help those people overcome their suffering. When I help another person surpass his or her suffering, I later remember my own kindness. On the other hand, after a contradictory act I recall that moment as one where my life went wrong. Thus, acts of contradiction invert the wheel of life, whereas acts that end in other people—helping them surpass their suffering—turn the wheel of life.

All acts that end in oneself inevitably lead toward contradiction, toward contamination of one's immediate surroundings. Even pure wisdom, intellectual wisdom that resides only within oneself, can lead to contradiction. It is a time for action, and the action that is called for consists of beginning to help others overcome their suffering. That is right action, compassion, the moral act *par excellence.*

"In that action of people helping other people, does there not exist the danger of 'the blind leading the blind'?"

Reverend, it is possible for a blind person to use other senses. It is possible that, walking through the night, a blind person might hear the distant sound of a waterfall, or the slithering of a serpent drawing near. Therefore, it is possible for a blind person, relying on other senses, to

warn those whose hearing is not so acute that there is danger nearby. And I would go further to say that this blind person is not only useful for others who are blind but also for those who have eyes but in the night are unable to see.

"In order that harmony be generated within us, it is necessary for us to do something within ourselves. Children grow up naturally, without thinking about it, but their conduct has no direction until they learn something about themselves. The forces of nature also act without direction, without consciousness of what they do."

Reverend, human beings also learn by doing—in the measure that they do things, they learn. People learn to type, for example, by putting their hands to work, and then through trial and error they gradually improve their movements. We say that one *learns by doing.* The very act of thinking is a primary act of the consciousness. Of course, letting your mind wander is not the same thing as thinking with direction. The act of thinking with direction implies a prior act of consciousness. And if I propose to stop thinking, producing a mental void, then I'm acting in that direction.

"We ask: Is action prior to thought, or is thought prior to action?"

Reverend, from our point of view, there are no linear causes and effects. There is a circuit of feedback in which one thing feeds back upon another, and this produces growth. Put in visual images, if we view it from above, the process is circular—it looks like a wheel; if we view it from the side, we realize it is a spiral in motion that grows at every turn. Thus, it is possible not to know how to do something, but by working on that task one's experience is enriched, and from this enrichment there arise ideas, and these new ideas are reapplied to the task. In that sense, the human being has grown differently from other living beings. Human beings have grown through having grappled with the pain of their own bodies as they tried to obtain warmth, shelter, and food, and endeavored to foresee the future physical injuries with which nature challenges them. Thus, through trial and error, the human being has transformed nature. Now, the human being—always active, learning, and growing—must restore balance to the current imbalances. This is the idea with which I would answer your question about thought and action.

"Unfortunately, the human being has difficulties in attempting to deal with nature, and this brings suffering."

Reverend, unfortunately you are right. The human being has long experienced suffering, and still today continues to suffer in that encounter with nature; but we should also recall that through this suffering the human being has learned. Progress, in reality, has been a rebellion against suffering, against death—the motor of human history has been the human being's rebellion against death. Of course, humankind has suffered enormously in this process.

But we know that there is a great difference between *pain* and *suffering.* Pain is physical, and this pain will be overcome when science and the organization of society have developed sufficiently. Truly, physical pain can be overcome. Medical advances show this to be the case; social progress demonstrates this as well. But *mental suffering* is a very different thing. There is no science or organization of society that can overcome mental suffering. Human beings have grown as they have managed to overcome a great deal of their physical pain, but they have yet to surpass their mental suffering. And the notable and significant function that the great messages and great teachings have served has been to make us understand that we need very

precise conditions in order to surpass suffering. About this point we can say little more at this time. There are the teachings, and we respect them as they are.

But in this world of perceptions, in this world of the immediate, in this world of aggregates for consciousness, in which illusory perception and illusory memory produce in me an illusory consciousness and a consciousness of an illusory self; in this world in which I am provisionally submerged, I do things in order that pain may be overcome, and I try to help science and the organization of society move in a direction that improves human life. I also understand that when human beings truly need to surpass mental suffering, they will have to appeal to understandings that rend the veil of maya, that penetrate illusion. But the straight path is one that begins immediately before us—it is the one we walk in compassion, in helping others to overcome pain.

Public Talk in Bombay

Chowpatty Beach, Bombay, India, November 1, 1981

In a small rural village at the foot of the highest mountains of the West, in faraway South America, we gave our first message. What did we say on that occasion? We said: Without inner faith, without faith in oneself, there is fear; fear produces suffering; suffering produces violence; violence produces destruction. Therefore, faith in oneself overcomes destruction.

We also said: There are many forms of violence and destruction. There is physical violence, and there is economic violence, racial violence, religious violence, psychological violence, and moral violence. We denounced all forms of violence, and in response we were told that we must keep silent. And so we kept silent, but first we explained: “If what we have said is false, it will soon disappear. If it is true, there is no power on Earth that will be able to stop it.”

Twelve years of silence have passed, and now we are speaking once again, and thousands upon thousands of people on the different continents of the Earth are listening to what we say. And in the cynical West some people ask: “How can it be that people listen to you, since you do not promise anyone wealth or happiness, you perform no miracles, and you cure no one? You are not a teacher or a great master, but simply a man like other men.”

“There is nothing extraordinary about you,” they say. “You aren’t an example to be followed, you aren’t a wise man or someone who’s discovered a new truth… And you don’t even speak in our language. How is it possible that anyone would want to listen to you?”

Oh, brothers and sisters of Asia, they do not understand the voice that speaks from heart to heart!

In the West, they have achieved a certain level of material development. They have achieved a material level that we also need. But we want development and progress without their suicide, without their alcoholism, without their drug addiction, without their madness, without their violence, their sickness, and their death.

We are common people, we are not cynics, and when we speak from heart to heart, good men and women in all latitudes understand us and love us.

And what do we say today from India, the throbbing heart of the world, from India whose spiritual reserves have been a teaching and an answer for a world whose mind is sick? We say: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” There is no human act superior to this; there is no moral law higher than this. When human beings understand this and carry it out in practice every day, and in every hour of every day, they progress and help others to progress with them.

The Earth is being dehumanized, and life is being dehumanized, and people are losing faith in themselves and in life. Therefore, to Humanize the Earth is to humanize the values of life. What is more important than overcoming the pain and suffering in others and in oneself? To make science and knowledge progress is of value if it goes in the direction of life. The fair and just production and distribution of the means of subsistence, health care, education, the formation of intellectuals with a sensitivity to social issues—these are tasks to be undertaken with the enthusiasm and faith merited by every action that struggles to overcome pain in others.

Everything that improves life is good; everything that opposes life is bad. That which unites people is good; that which divides them is bad. That which affirms “there is still future” is good;

to say there is no future or meaning in life is bad. To give the peoples of the Earth faith in themselves is good; the fanaticism that opposes life is bad.

To Humanize the Earth is also to humanize those who have influence and power over others, so that they in turn will listen to the voices of those who need to overcome poverty and disease. Our Community is inspired by the great teachings that preach tolerance among all people. And that tolerance goes even further, because it sets as the highest value of every human act this principle: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” Only if people put this principle into practice—this principle that is opposed to insensitivity, to selfishness and cynicism—will they be able to begin to Humanize the Earth. Our Community is a tolerant and nonviolent moral force that teaches that the highest value is to “treat others as you want them to treat you.” This is the moral impulse that must give direction to the new generations and be put into practice by everyone who truly wants to begin to Humanize our Earth.

Many people want to become better human beings, many want to overcome their inner confusion and spiritual sickness, and they believe that they can do so by closing their eyes to the world in which they live. I say that they will grow in spirit only if they begin to help others to surpass their pain and suffering. That is why we propose that people act in the world and not abandon the parties or organizations to which they belong. On the contrary, if one believes that one’s organization can contribute to overcoming pain and suffering, one should participate there with enthusiasm. And if these organizations have shortcomings, then one should push to correct them and to turn these organizations and these efforts into instruments in the service of humanization. Because, if faith in oneself is not renewed, in the sense that one is able to contribute to progress, and if faith in the possibility of change in others is not renewed (even when those others are not without their shortcomings), then we shall stand paralyzed before the future—and the dehumanization of the Earth will surely triumph.

To form communities with the members of one’s family, with coworkers, friends, and neighbors; to form them in the cities and in the countryside; to form these communities as a moral force that gives us faith in ourselves, in others, and in human communities—all this is to grow in spirit as you look upon the face of your brother and sister, so that they too may grow. And if you believe in God, consider His infinite goodness and His plan that the human being will one day stand up and honor the Earth by humanizing it.

You must begin a new life, and you must have faith in what you can do. In order for this to be possible, accompany me in a free, courageous, and profound act that is also a commitment to reconciliation. Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation. Let me repeat this: Go to your parents, your loved ones, those close to you; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation.

To all of you, Peace, Force, and Joy!

Regarding What Is Human

Tortuguitas, Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 1, 1983

Talk in a Study Group

To have an understanding of the human phenomenon in general is one thing, while one's own register of the humanity of the other is something quite different.

Let's consider the first question—that is, an understanding of the human phenomenon in general.

If one says that what is most characteristic of the human being is sociability, or language, or the transmission of experience, one still has not fully defined the human being, because we find all of these expressed in the animal world as well, if only in some elementary state of development. We can observe chemical recognition, and consequent attractions or rejections, in organisms of the hive, the school, or the pack. There are host, parasitic, and symbiotic forms of organization in which we can recognize elementary patterns of what we later see in more elaborate form in human groups. We also find a kind of animal "morality," with social punishment for transgressors, even when those behaviors, viewed from the outside, might be interpreted on the basis of the instinct of preservation of the species or as a complex of conditioned and unconditioned reflexes. Rudimentary technology is also not unknown in the animal world, nor are the emotions of affection, hostility, grief, and solidarity, whether among members of a group, or between groups, or between species.

Well then, what is it that defines *what is human* as such, if not the reflection of the socio-historical as personal memory? Every animal is always the first animal, while every human being is his or her historical and social environment, along with a reflection of, and a contribution to, the transformation or inertia of that environment. For an animal, the environment is the *natural* environment. For the human being, the environment is the *historical and social* environment, the transformation of that environment, and certainly the adaptation of nature to both immediate and longer-term needs. When compared to the systems of ideation, behavior, and life of the animal world, the human being's deferred response to immediate stimuli—the meaning and direction of human labor with respect to a future that is planned (or imagined)—presents us with a new characteristic. The broadening of the temporal horizon of human consciousness allows it to delay responses to stimuli, locating such phenomena in a complex mental space configured for the placement of deliberations, comparisons, and conclusions that lie outside the field of immediate perception.

In other words, in the human being there is no human "nature" unless this "nature" is considered a capacity, distinct from that of other animals, to move through various times that are outside the horizon of perception. Putting this in yet another way, if there is something "natural" in the human being, it is not in the mineral, vegetable, or animal sense, but rather in the sense that what is natural in the human being is change, history, transformation.

It is difficult to adequately reconcile the idea of *change* with the idea of *nature,* and therefore we prefer not to use the word nature as it has been used in the past—this term that has been so often used to justify all sorts of treachery toward the human being. For example, simply because the original inhabitants of a particular place appeared different from their foreign conquerors,

these inhabitants were called aboriginals or “natives.” Because other races presented different morphologies or coloration, they were ascribed different “natures” within the human species, and so on. Thus, there was a “natural” order, and changing that order was a sin against all that was eternally established. Different races, different sexes, different social positions—all were fixed within a supposedly natural order that was to be conserved for all time.

The idea of “human nature” that had served an order of natural production broke down in the period of industrial transformation. Yet even today we still see vestiges of the zoological ideology of human nature—in the field of psychology, for example, in which people still talk about certain natural faculties such as the “will” and similar things. Natural law, the State as part of a projected human nature, and other such notions have not contributed to progress, but only to historical inertia and the negation of transformation.

If copresence in human consciousness functions because of its enormous temporal broadening, and if the intentionality of human consciousness allows it to project a meaning, then what is most characteristic of the human being is *being* and *making the meaning of the world.* As this is said in *Humanize the Earth:*

> Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.
>
> I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.

We stand, then, at a great distance from the idea of human nature—in fact, at its polar opposite. What I mean is that if an imposed, supposedly permanent order, a “nature,” has ended up suffocating that which is human, now we are saying the contrary: What is natural must be humanized, and this humanization of the world makes humankind a creator of meaning, direction, and transformation. And if that meaning liberates us from the supposedly “natural” conditions of pain and suffering, then what is truly human is what goes beyond the natural—it is your project, your future; it is your child; it is your dawn; it is your breeze and your storm; it is your anger and your caress; it is your fear and trembling for a future, for a new human being free from pain and suffering.

Let’s now consider the second question: one’s own register of the humanity of others.

Insofar as one registers the presence of the other as “natural,” then the other will be no more than an object-like, or perhaps animal presence. Insofar as one is anesthetized against perceiving the temporal horizon of the other, the other will have no meaning beyond a for-me. *The nature of the other person will be a for-me.* But when I constitute the other person as a *for-me,* I constitute and alienate myself in my own *for-myself.* I say, “I am for-me,” and in saying that I close my horizon of transformation. People who make others into “things” make themselves into things, too, thereby closing off their own horizons.

Insofar as I do not experience the other except as a for-me, my vital activity will not humanize the world. The other must be an inner register for me, a warm sensation of an open future that does not end in the objectifying non-meaning of death.

To feel that which is human in the other is to feel the life of the other in a beautiful, multicolored rainbow that moves farther and farther away the more I try to stop, to seize, to

capture its expression. You grow farther away, and I take comfort if I have helped you to break your chains, to overcome your pain and suffering. And if you accompany me, it is because in a free act you constitute yourself as a human being, and not simply because you were born “human.” I sense in you the liberty and the possibility of your constituting yourself as a human being, and in you my acts find the liberty at which they aim. And so, not even your death can halt the actions you set in motion, because you are in essence time and liberty. What I love in the human being, then, is its growing humanization. And in these times of crisis, reification, and dehumanization, I love the possibility of the human being’s future vindication.

Religiosity in the Contemporary World

Casa Suiza, Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 6, 1986

Before speaking, Silo was introduced with the following remarks by a founding member of the Community for Human Development:

When one introduces a speaker, it is not uncommon to touch on the speaker's prior talks and the surrounding circumstances, and so today I will do exactly that.

In the state of siege imposed by Argentina's military government during the latter part of the 1960s, Silo's first attempt to speak publicly was forbidden. When the authorities were consulted about whether Silo could give the speech at a location far removed from any urban center, they granted permission with the sarcastic remark that there was no ban on "speaking to the stones." And so on May 4, 1969, high in the Andes at a place known as Punta de Vacas, Silo spoke before a small group that had had to endure interrogation and harassment by armed security forces. Despite these difficulties, CBS broadcast the message beyond the stones, reaching 250 television channels around the world.

On July 20 of that same year in Yala, a town in Argentina in the province of Jujuy, police dispersed those who had gathered in a field to hear Silo speak; there was no speech that day. On September 26 in Barrio Yapeyú in the province of Cordoba, tear gas was used and sixty arrests were made; again no speech was allowed. On October 21 at a press conference in Buenos Aires, despite harassment by the authorities, it was announced that Silo would attempt once more to speak publicly. On October 31 in Plaza Once in Buenos Aires, this attempt, like the previous ones, was met with tear gas, there were thirty arrests, and again no speech was permitted.

When a new military regime came to power, officials gave authorization for Silo to give a short course privately on specific subjects. This course was to take place August 16–19, 1972, and in the interim a supposedly democratic civilian government was elected by the people. On August 15, Silo gave a private talk in Cordoba, and the authorities arrested eighty people. On August 17 in Mar del Plata, the police blocked yet another attempt to speak. The result: 150 arrests. And the final attempt, in that same auditorium on September 13, 1974, resulted in 500 arrests, with Silo jailed in Villa Devoto. All of this took place during a time of "democratic government."

On October 15, 1974, in Mendoza, the house of a member of the Movement was bombed. On July 24, 1975, in La Plata, eleven participants in the Movement were arrested and imprisoned for six months, and two others were assassinated. In the ensuing persecution, hundreds of Movement activists were fired from their jobs and many were exiled, with the result that they were dispersed to numerous other countries, taking their message with them.

Following a new military coup, there could be no thought of giving speeches, but word was circulating that Silo had been invited to give a series of talks in Europe and Asia since it was not possible to do so in his own country. Then on August 12, 1981, just a week before he was to leave, shots were fired at Silo in an attempt on his life.

Upon his return from abroad, Editorial Bruguera was just publishing one of Silo's books, and he was invited to speak on the book's publication at the Eighth International Book Fair in

Buenos Aires on April 10, 1982. But the authorities allowed only twenty people into the room to hear Silo speak, because, they explained, "it appeared that the floor was not in good condition."

Add to all this the sustained, malicious distortions in the reporting of these events by the press under every one of these regimes, and it is clear with what coin the advocacy of a methodology of nonviolence and pacifism has been repaid.

Now that we have returned once again to a democratic government here in Argentina, on this occasion Silo will offer his thoughts on religiosity in today's world, on another occasion he will speak on politics, and in the future he will speak on still other subjects. We trust that we will not encounter any further difficulties in this regard.

What possible use can there be in a discussion of religiosity in today's world? That depends. For those concerned with the development of social phenomena, any change in beliefs and religiosity may be of interest. For the politician, the subject holds no interest whatsoever, as long as religiosity is in decline; but if religiosity is on the rise then it will certainly merit attention. For us common, ordinary people, a discussion of this subject may draw our interest if it can be seen to be linked to the search or aspiration for something beyond the everyday. I don't think that in my remarks today I will be able to fully address such diverse interests. And so I will not pretend to give a scientific exposition following the model of a sociologist—I will simply try to illustrate my point of view on this question.

I will not attempt to define either *religiosity* or *religion;* instead, I will leave those two terms floating in the air, with meanings as might be intuitively understood by today's average citizen. Of course, I will not confuse a religion—its church, rituals, forms of worship, or theology—with *religiosity* or religious sentiment, which is quite frequently found outside of any church, ritual, form of worship, or theology. In any case, this state of consciousness, this religious sentiment, is surely referred to some object, since in every state of consciousness and therefore in every sentiment there is a structure in which *acts of consciousness* are in relation to their corresponding *objects.*

From this point on, I hope that those of you who are experts in these subjects will greet our somewhat naive thoughts with a tolerant smile rather than a gesture of disdain. So let's open our bag of opinions and see if anything in it is of use.

In my opinion:

First, a new type of religiosity has begun to develop in recent decades. Second, underlying this religiosity is a diffuse background of rebellion. Third, as a consequence of the impact of this new religiosity and, of course, as a consequence of the dizzying changes taking place in all societies, it is possible that at their core the traditional religions may undergo reaccommodations and adaptations of substantial importance. Fourth, it is highly likely that people all over the planet will experience further psychosocial shocks in the coming years and that this new type of religiosity I have been referring to will figure as an important factor in this phenomenon.

Furthermore, and even though it may seem contrary to the opinion of most social observers, I do not believe that religions have lost their impetus. I do not believe that they are increasingly cut off from power in political, economic, and social decision-making, nor do I believe that religiosity has ceased to stir the consciousness of the peoples of the Earth.

Let me try to support these opinions with some background:

The textbooks tell us that if we mark off a rectangle lying between 20 and 40 degrees north latitude and 30 and 90 degrees east longitude, we will find ourselves in a region of the globe in

which great religions have arisen that have gone on to cover the Earth. More precisely, we are told that the three points known today as Israel, Iran, and India have acted for thousands of years as “centers of barometric pressure of the human spirit.” These centers have generated what might be called ”spiritual cyclones,” which in turn have demolished entire political systems, forms of social organization, and customs that preceded them, and in their beginnings have sent forth a faith and hope for all those who felt failure in the face of established power and the anguish of the world.

Judaism produced both the religion of its own people, its national religion, and a universal missionary religion: Christianity. The genius of the Arab people in turn wove together out of the diversity of its tribal beliefs a religion that was also missionary and universal in character—Islam, sometimes also called Mohammedanism—which was in its origins indebted to Judaism and Christianity as important sources. Today, Judaism as a religion of the Jewish people and Christianity and Islam as universal religions are still living and continue to evolve.

To the east in what is now Iran, the ancient national religion gave way to other missionary and universal religions. Of the mother religion, there remain today only about one hundred thousand believers, and these mostly in India, particularly Bombay. In their country of origin, these believers no longer have any real relevance, since Iran has long been in the hands of Islam. But down through the years and as late as the fourth century of this era, the missionary religions of Iran advanced eastward and westward to such distances and with such strength that it appeared they would prevail in their competition with Christianity. In the end, however, Christianity triumphed, and these other missionary religions were abolished along with the paganism of the ancient world. Thus, the religions that had been generated in Iran apparently died out forever. And yet, many of their concepts and beliefs continued to have strong influence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, producing heresies within the orthodoxy of these religions. For example, the Shiite sect of Islam, which stands as the official religion in today’s Iran, was strongly affected by these forces. Then, in the nineteenth century, a new religious force emerged in Iran; at first called Babism, it later came to be known as the Baha’i faith.

In India, the national religion of Hinduism produced several other religions, among which Buddhism, with its missionary and universal character, is perhaps best known. Both the mother religion and others from earlier times are still vigorous today. And in this century, Hinduism—for so long only a national religion—began for the first time to expand beyond India, sending missions to the West, among which we recognize the Hare Krishna faith. This is perhaps one of several responses to the arrival in India of Christianity as the religion of English colonialism.

Nor do we wish to overlook such important religions as those of China, Japan, and black Africa or those that flourished in the Americas. None of these other religions, however, has managed to forge great supranational currents in the way that Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism have. So it was that, following the expulsion of the Muslims from Europe, Christianity reached the Americas, was imposed on these continents, and spread across them. And Islam spread beyond the borders of the Arab world, expanding throughout Africa and east into Turkey, Russia, India, China, Indochina, and beyond. Buddhism made its way into Tibet, China, Mongolia, Russia, Japan, and all of Southeast Asia.

Almost from the beginnings of these great world religions, schisms arose. That is, these religions began to divide into sects: Islam into Sunnis and Shiites; Christianity into Nestorians, Monophysites, and others—and since the Calvinist, Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Anglican reformations, it can be seen as split into two large sects, generically called Catholic and Protestant, to which, of course, must be added the Orthodox Churches. With the fragmentation

of the great religions, we see the emergence of the great sects. And if the struggle for temporal power among the different religions was long and fierce (as in the Crusades, for example), the wars between the great sects within each religion sometimes reached unimaginable extremes of ferocity. Time and again, reformations and counter-reformations of every kind have been visited upon the world. And so it went, until the time of the revolutions that mark what in scholarly circles is generically called the "Modern Age."

In the West, the French, English, and American Revolutions moderated the previous excesses of these sectarian struggles, and the new ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity permeated the social sphere. This was the age of the bourgeois revolutions. New cults emerged such as that of the Goddess Reason, a form of rationalist religiosity. Other more or less scientific currents displayed an almost social evangelism, as they proclaimed the egalitarian ideals from which they derived their plans for a new society. As industrialism took shape, the sciences began to organize themselves along new lines, and during this period the official religions lost much ground.

In the *Communist Manifesto,* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels magnificently describe the situation of those inventors of social gospels. As they wrote in the third section of Chapter III: "The socialist and communist systems properly so called, those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and others, spring into existence in the early period…of the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Since the development of class antagonism keeps even pace with the development of industry, the economic situation, as such socialists find it, does not as yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. They therefore search after a new social science, after new social laws that are to create these conditions. Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors."

Within these currents of social evangelism, the writer Auguste Comte appeared. Comte worked on Saint-Simon's newspaper and also collaborated with him on "The Industrialists' Catechism." Comte is known for having begun the school of philosophy known as positivism and also for having formulated the concept and invented the name of the social sciences, which he called "sociology." He was the author of *The Catechism of Positive Religion* and founded the Religion of Humanity. In England some traces of this religion still remain, but in France, its country of origin, it no longer exists. Still, it did manage to transplant itself to the Americas, reaching Brazil, where it put down roots and continued to influence the education of several generations of positivists, though less from a religious than from a philosophical point of view.

These new currents were soon joined by a stream of militant atheism, as in the case of Bakunin and the anarchists, archenemies of both God and the State. In these instances what one finds is not simply irreligiosity, but rabid attacks on anything that remotely smacks of religion, and particularly of Christianity. And then, of course, there is Nietzsche's famous statement, "God is dead," which has had such ramifications in this century.

Other mutations were taking place as well. Leon Rivail, in Switzerland, was the organizer of the ideas of Pestalozzi, one of the creators of modern pedagogy. Rivail took the name Allan Kardec and became the founder of Spiritism, one of the most important religious movements of recent years. Kardec's *Spiritualist Philosophy: The Spirits' Book* was published in 1857, and the movement to which it gave rise expanded throughout Europe, the Americas, and even parts of Asia.

Then came Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and other expressions, all of which might be grouped together under the rubric of “occultist currents” rather than religion, strictly speaking. Neither Spiritism nor these occultist groups have the features of sects within a religion but rather another character altogether, though in any case they certainly involve religiosity. These associations, among which we also include Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, achieved their greatest gains in the nineteenth century, with the exception of Spiritism, which continues growing vigorously to this day.

With the enormous proliferation of sects within sects that occurs as we approach the twentieth century, things become little less than chaotic. Christian sects such as the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with countless others, appeared. Much the same occurred in Asia, where social gospels also inclined toward the mystical. For example, in China in the 1850s, the Tai-Ping gained such strength across large parts of the country that all that was missing for it to be able to declare itself a socialist republic, collectivize the means of production, and bring equality to the living conditions of the people, was the taking of Beijing. The political ideas proclaimed by that movement’s leader, the “King of Heaven,” were imbued with elements of Taoism and Christianity. The ensuing struggle against the Empire claimed millions of lives.

In 1910, Tolstoy died in Russia. By the latter part of his life, he had so distanced himself from the Orthodox Church that the Holy Synod had decided to excommunicate him. Tolstoy was a fervent Christian, but after his own fashion. He proclaimed the Gospel that he recognized: *Take no part in war; swear no oaths; judge no one; resist not evil with force.* Then he abandoned everything—books, home, family. No longer was he the brilliant, world-renowned writer, the author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace;* he had become a Christian-anarcho-pacifist mystic, the source and inspiration for a new teaching and a new methodology of struggle: nonviolence.

Tolstoy’s anarcho-pacifism, combined with the ideas of Ruskin and the social gospel of Fourier mentioned by Marx in his *Manifesto,* came together in a young Indian attorney, Mohandas Gandhi, who was active in the struggle against discrimination in South Africa. Following the model of Fourier, Gandhi founded a communal phalanstery, but above all he experimented with a new form of political struggle. He returned to India, and in the following years the movement for Indian independence began to coalesce around him. It was with Gandhi that peaceful marches, sit-down strikes, the blocking of streets and railways with bodies lying limp, hunger strikes, and peaceful sit-ins began—what was called ”civil disobedience.”

This was no longer the strategy of taking over critical nerve centers as in the revolutionary tactics of Trotsky—this was quite the reverse: to create a void. And so there occurred a most extraordinary confrontation: a struggle in which a *moral force* was pitted against all the forces of economic, political, and military might. Of course, with Gandhi we are not talking about some soft, sentimental pacifism, but rather an active resistance, probably the most courageous form of struggle there is, in which one’s defenseless body is totally exposed, as with empty hands Gandhi and his followers faced the bullets of the Western invaders and colonizers. This “naked fakir,” as the English Prime Minister called him, ultimately won the struggle, but was later assassinated.

In the meantime, the world continued to suffer one tremendous shock after another. World War I broke out, and the socialist revolution triumphed in Russia. This last occurrence demonstrated in practice that those ideas considered utopian by right-thinking people of the time could not only be applied in practice but could also modify social reality. The new structuring and planning for the future in Russia changed the political map of Europe. The

philosophy that organized the ideas of the Revolution began to spread vigorously throughout the world, as Marxism leapt quickly not just from country to country but from continent to continent.

It is good to recall some of the events that took place during that period of war, from 1914 to 1918. Any list of events would include more or less the following: Richardson described his electron theory of matter; Einstein introduced his theory of general relativity; Windhaus carried out research in biochemistry; Morgan performed his experiments on the mechanism of Mendelian inheritance; Mayerhof studied the physiology of muscles; Juan Gris revolutionized painting; Bartok composed his Hungarian dances; Sibelius his Symphony No. 5; Siegbahn studied the X-ray spectrum; Pareto wrote his *Sociology;* Kafka, *Metamorphosis;* Spengler, *The Decline of the West;* Mayakovsky his *Mystery-Bouffe* (Comic Mystery); Freud, *Totem and Taboo;* and Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology.*

In addition, aerial and submarine warfare were introduced, and poison gas and tear gas were used for the first time. The Spartacus League emerged in Germany; Turkish power was broken in Palestine; Wilson announced his Fourteen Points; the Japanese entered Siberia; there were revolutions in Austria and Germany; republics were declared in Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia; the Yugoslav state was born; Poland gained its independence; women gained the vote in England; the Panama Canal was opened; the Empire was re-established in China; Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens; and the Mexican Constitution was approved.

We were at the dawn of the technological revolution, the collapse of colonialism, and the beginning of imperialism on a worldwide scale. The catalogue of watershed events would grow even longer in the following years, and even to list them all would be impossible; but for purposes of our theme, we will mention a few key events.

In science, Einstein made truth flexible: No longer were there absolute truths, but only truths relative to a given system. Freud claimed that reason itself is moved by dark forces that, in their struggle with the superstructures of morality and customs, determine human life. Bohr's model of the atom had shown matter to be largely emptiness, vacuum—and the rest electrical charge of infinitesimal mass. The universe, according to astrophysicists, began in an initial explosion that expanded outward, forming galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and island universes, all moving toward increasing entropy that will finally end in catastrophe… In that universe, we find a spiral galaxy of perhaps 100 billion stars, and out on the edge of that galaxy a small yellow star about 30,000 light-years from the center of the system. A mere eight light-minutes from that star revolves an absurd particle some 12,000 kilometers in diameter. And on that particle another war has broken out, embroiling even the most remote parts of the planet.

The various forms of fascism advanced. One of their representatives proclaimed: "Long live Death!" But this new war was not a religious conflict; it was a struggle between businessmen and mad ideologies. There were genocide and holocausts, hunger, sickness, and destruction on a scale never before witnessed on the face of the Earth. Human life was reduced to absurdity.

Some were led to ponder, "Why exist? What *is* existence?" The world had exploded. One's senses deceived one; reality was not what one saw with one's own eyes. Then a young physicist, Robert Oppenheimer, while studying Sanskrit so that he might understand the Vedas of Hinduism, became director of the Manhattan Project. In the early morning hours of July 16, 1945, he made history—a light brighter than the sun was detonated on the Earth. The nuclear age had begun, and World War II was brought to an end as other men brought destruction to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

From then on, there was no longer any civilization or point on the globe that was not in contact with all the others—a communications network covered the Earth. And this involved

more than just the objects of production transported by air, sea, or land; it also involved language signs, the human voice, and information that instantaneously reached all points on the globe. While the Earth healed its wounds, Pakistan and India became independent and the war in Indochina began. Israel was declared a state, as was the People's Republic of China with Mao at its helm.

In 1951, the European socialist bloc created COMECON, while Western Europe created the Coal and Iron Community. There was war in Korea and that other conflict, the so-called Cold War between capitalism and socialism. In the United States, Senator McCarthy began his witch-hunt. There were arrests, firings, blacklisting, and even deaths among those like the Rosenbergs who were minor spies, or only suspected of espionage. Stalinism, for its part, carried out every possible kind of atrocity and repression. With Stalin's death, Khrushchev rose to power, and the world's eyes were opened to reality. Intellectuals of good will who had considered all the stories simply attempts by Western propaganda to discredit the U.S.S.R. were stunned. Then came the disorders in Poland and the return of Gomulka to power. In 1956, the Hungarian uprising took place, and the leadership of the U.S.S.R. had to choose between Russian national security on the one hand, and the International and their image on the other. The leaders chose security, and Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary, producing a shock to the Party worldwide.

Fresh winds began to blow. The new faith was in crisis. In Africa, liberation movements followed one after another. National borders shifted. The Arab world was convulsed, while in Latin America the injustices that had propped up tyrannical regimes worsened under the delayed influence of European fascism. Coups, countercoups, and the fall of dictators continued. The United States, now established as an empire, maintained a rear guard in Latin America. The enormous wealth of Brazil remained in the hands of a few, while the country grew and inequality became an increasingly pronounced social irritant. Brazil was a sleeping giant, but it was awakening. Its borders touched on almost every country of South America. Its religions, such as Umbanda and Candomble—born in Angola and other parts of Africa—spread to Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay.

The "Switzerland of the Americas," as Uruguay was once known, went bankrupt. Agrarian, cattle-raising Argentina became another country altogether, unleashing the most formidable mass movements ever seen in the Americas. A populist president and his charismatic wife proclaimed their doctrine with its "social mysticism." An earlier president, almost opposite in his positions, though equally populist, had been a Krausist and a believer in Spiritism. The year 1955 saw several Catholic churches burned in Argentina. How could this be happening here? This peaceful country, no longer the "breadbasket of the world," was struggling to throw off the remnants of British economic colonialism.

It is in the context of these conflicts that Ernesto "Che" Guevara emerged. Guevara was an important figure in the Cuban government following the successful 1959 Cuban Revolution that overthrew Batista, and he went on to fight for revolutions in other countries and on other continents. A Guevarist uprising failed in Sri Lanka, but his influence ignited youthful guerrilla movements in far-flung places of the world. He was both theorist and man of action. Using the ancient words of Saint Paul, he attempted to call forth the "new man" and almost poetically proclaimed: "From today onward, History will be forced to take into account the poor of the Americas." Little by little he moved away from his original ideas; today his image is frozen forever in the photograph printed around the world. He is dead, but someplace in Bolivia he remains the Christ of Las Higueras.

During this period the Catholic Church issued a number of pronouncements on social issues, and it organized the Christian-Social International, under different names depending on the country. In Europe, the Christian Democrats come to power in several countries, and from that time on power was traded back and forth among the Social Democrats, the Christian Socialists, and the Liberal-Conservatives. Christian Socialism spread to Latin America. In Japan, the imperial religion of Shintoism received a critical blow, and through the small Soka-gakkai sect Buddhism moved in, mushrooming to six million believers within six years. From that base, the Komeito was launched, and it soon became the third-largest political party in Japan.

In 1957, the U.S.S.R. launched the first artificial satellite into orbit around the Earth. With this event, at least two things became clear to the general public: first, that interplanetary travel was possible; and second, with satellites as antennae and relays, the entire world could now be connected via television. From that time on, images were beamed to every point where a television receiver could be found. The electronic revolution erased all national borders. And that led to another problem: the manipulation of information and the use of ever more sophisticated propaganda. Now the System was able to enter any household—but information could enter as well.

With the nuclear tests on Bikini atoll, the world was introduced to the bathing suit that still bears that name. The Mao jacket was adopted as casual dress. The voluptuousness of Marilyn Monroe, Anita Ekberg, and Gina Lollobrigida gave way to a unisex look that tended to blur the differences between the sexes. The Beatles appeared as a new role model for youth. Young people everywhere began to cherish their blue jeans. Europe had suffered a substantial decrease in the percentage of men in its demographic pyramid, and following the war women became a more significant part of both labor and management. But this also happened in the U.S. and other places where not nearly so much blood had been shed. The influx of women into the labor force was a worldwide process, despite the stubborn resistance of those who discriminated against them. But this process was not always as rapid as in other fields, and once again the right to vote for women was defeated in Switzerland. In spite of everything, however, women now attended schools and universities that had once been closed to them, and they participated politically and protested against the Establishment.

Toward the end of the sixties, a youth revolution arose around the world—first students in Cairo, then in Nanterre and at the Sorbonne. The wave reached Rome and spread across all of Europe. In Mexico, security forces shot three hundred students, and the Paris student uprising of May 1968 stunned every political party. No one knew what was happening, not even the protagonists of the struggle—it was a psychosocial torrent. Young people cried, “We don’t know what we want, but we know what we don’t want!” What do we need? “Power to the Imagination!” Demonstrations by students and young workers erupted in country after country. Though protests at Berkeley focused on the war in Vietnam and those in Europe and Latin America on other causes, what was striking was the simultaneity of the phenomena. A new generation spoke, showing that the planet had indeed become unified.

On May 20, a strike in France spread to six million workers; the government organized counter-demonstrations, and De Gaulle’s administration tottered. In the United States, civil-rights leader and minister Martin Luther King was assassinated. The world of the young was filled with hippies, yippies, counterculture fashion, and music—lots of music.

Three paths—guerrilla action, drugs, and mysticism—were explored by different parts of this generation. Each of these paths is distinct from and normally at odds with the others, yet during

this time it seemed they all had in common a mark of rebellion against the Establishment. The guerrillas formed groups like the Bader-Meinhoff gang, the Red Brigades, the Tupamaros, the Montoneros, the Mir, and so on. Many followed the model of Che Guevara, killing others and causing their own deaths. Others took as their model the teachings of Aldous Huxley and the great psychedelics like Baudelaire. More than a few of these young people, too, ended up in suicide. Finally, the third group explored every possibility of inner change. Their models were figures such as Alan Watts, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Orientalism in general. Quite a number of these young people destroyed themselves as well. Of course, these factions were minuscule in comparison to the entire generation, but these things were symptomatic of the new times. The System reacted quickly: “All young people are suspect.” Everywhere the hunt was on, though with a methodology that was brutal or sophisticated depending on the means available in each place.

Cases such as those of the IRA, the Basque ETA, the Corsican movement, and the PLO do not precisely fit the generational pattern we have been describing. These represent a different phenomenon, even when at times they overlap with what we are describing.

In 1969, the United States put the first man on the moon. From the time that panic had been spread across the United States by the radio broadcast of Orson Welles’ *The War of the Worlds,* science fiction had grown increasingly popular—and not just Martians fighting Earthlings. In stories, films, and TV series, the protagonists became robots, computers, mutants, androids, and demigods. Let’s recall those times. You may remember that since 1945 there had been a growing number of reports from widely separated locations of strange objects in the skies. Sometimes these lights were very hard to explain. They began to be called “flying saucers” or generically UFOs—unidentified flying objects. Sightings would occur intermittently. Psychologists such as Jung became interested in this question. Physicists and astronomers gave skeptical explanations. Writers such as Cocteau went so far as to say that these were “beings from the future revisiting their past.” Centers were created in which observers, often coordinating with one another, watched the skies and tried to make contact with these purported beings from other worlds. Today these beliefs have gained considerable ground. Sightings have been reported with particular frequency in the Canary Islands, the south of France, the southern part of the U.S.S.R., the western United States, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1986, the government of Brazil officially announced visual and radar contact with a UFO. For the first time, a government had confirmed a contact. It also noted that the Brazilian Air Force had pursued the phenomenon.

While, as we have noted, the Catholic Church had begun to recover ground through confessional political parties, Islam was not far behind. Monarchies and unstable regimes were toppled, and Islamic republics began to multiply. Thus, by the 1970s, the great religions had recovered considerable ground on the political and economic fronts. Yet there was great concern about faith. Everyone realized that it was not enough for the traditional religions simply to regain the ground that the forces of politics had occupied for a time, to become simply an intermediary between the individual and the State, between needs and their solutions. Astute Muslim observers realized that many things had now changed. The old tribal organization had weakened. In many Arab countries oil wealth had been poured into new industrial development, and large urban centers had begun to spring up. The family had grown smaller and no longer lived as the old extended family had lived. The landscape of the young was changing—an exodus toward Europe had begun as workers from the poorest countries left their homelands seeking new sources of employment. Muslim countries that had begun to enjoy the prosperity

that oil made possible were also now experiencing the influence of Westernizing institutions, behavior, and fashions, particularly within the dominant strata of those societies. In this climate of change, the Shah of Iran imposed Westernization. He did so despotically, backed by the best-equipped army in the Middle East. Unskilled agricultural labor was absorbed by the oil-producing centers. With the exodus from the countryside, the cities mushroomed. But in Iran everything was under control; there was only one other leader, and he was not really a politician. He remained in exile in France, while the various political parties, under the watchful eye of the Savak and manipulated by their foreign masters, jockeyed for position. Surely no one need worry about an old theologian from the University of Quom. Nothing to take seriously, assured Western and Soviet analysts.

Suddenly, the cyclone of ancient Iran—that creator of universal spiritual movements, that hotbed of heresies and religious ferment—began to blow once more. For a week the whole world watched in stunned amazement as a psychosocial chain reaction was unleashed—it was like a dream. Governments in Iran rapidly succeeded one another; there was a vacuum at the center of public administration. The army remained paralyzed and was thus defeated. It was only in the religious sphere that things functioned. In the mosques, the mullahs and ayatollahs followed the orders that came down from the mythical Imam. And what then ensued constitutes a sad and bloody chapter in history.

Khomeini declared: “Islamic government is a government by divine right, and its laws cannot be changed, modified, or debated. In this lies the radical difference between an Islamic government and monarchical or republican governments, in which representatives of the State, or those elected by the people, propose and vote on laws, whereas in Islam the only authority is the Almighty and His divine will.” Muammar al-Khaddafi said in October 1972 in Tripoli: “Islam is an immutable truth; it gives man a sense of security because it comes from God. Theories invented by men may be the result of madness, like the theory proclaimed by Malthus. Even the pragmatism dictated by men is not free of falling into falseness and error. Thus, it is completely wrong to govern human society in the name of temporal or constitutional laws.”

Of course, I have quoted these statements out of context. But what I have tried to do is to transmit an understanding of the Islamic religious phenomenon as one that subordinates all activity to itself—including, of course, politics. And this particular tendency, once apparently in retreat, now appears to be gaining strength. We know that Islam is growing in the United States, while today in France there are 200,000 converts, and this does not include those of Arab extraction. Naturally, I give these two cases only as examples, since Islam has also had to change considerably as it has moved toward the West. The dervish and Sufi forms are particular cases of this tendency.

In Christianity today we can observe a certain mobility between the large sects. Thus, in countries where Protestantism is in some sense the “official religion,” the Protestant sects tend to be concentrated near the centers of power while Catholicism gains ground on the periphery. And conversely, in so-called “Catholic countries,” as Catholicism abandons the periphery, Protestant denominations move in to occupy those areas. This rapid and perceptible change inspires not a little alarm in both sects, though naturally with a different interpretation depending on which sect is dominant. In this struggle, groups of both persuasions sometimes resort to questionable tactics. But one can hardly blame Protestantism in general if a madman named Manson walks around with a cross and a Bible killing people, or if Protestants from the People’s Temple, in a parody of Masada, end up in a massive act of collective murder-suicide in Guyana. Those are phenomena, in my view, that correspond to the present state of psychosocial

dislocation, and are important inasmuch as they are symptomatic of a society on the verge of even more serious phenomena.

In my view, there is a possibility that Catholicism can regain a part of its lost influence in Latin America and, as a rebound, in Africa as well. That possibility may play out in the destiny of the so-called “Liberation Theology.” At present, Nicaragua stands as the best example of this compatibility between Christianity and social gospels.

The first interview ever to take place between Fidel Castro and a Catholic priest, Frei Betto, occurred in Havana on May 23, 1985. At 9:00 p.m. the priest made the following statement:

> Comandante, I am sure this is the first time that a head of state of a socialist country has given an exclusive interview on the subject of religion. The only precedent in this regard is the document that was issued by the National Headquarters of the Sandinista Liberation Front in 1980 on religion. That was the first time that a revolutionary party in power had issued a statement on that subject. Since then, there has not been a more informed, more probing word, even from the historical viewpoint, on the subject. And considering the current moment, when the problem of religion plays a fundamental ideological role in Latin America; considering the existence of numerous grassroots ecclesiastical communities (indigenous communities in Guatemala, campesinos in Nicaragua, workers in Brazil and many other countries); considering, too, the imperialist offensive that since the Declaration of Santa Fe has attempted to combat directly this more theoretical expression of the Church committed to the poor and known as Liberation Theology, I think that this interview and its contribution to this subject are very important.…

In turn, Armando Hart, the Cuban Minister of Culture, in his note to the book *Fidel and Religion,* says of the Christian-Marxist dialogue:

> And this is, in and of itself, a supremely important event in the history of human thought. The ethical and moral note appears in these lines charged with every human meaning that binds together those engaged in the struggle for freedom and in defense of the humble and the exploited. How can this miracle be happening? Social theorists, philosophers, theologians, and an enormous intellectual class in various countries will have to ask themselves this question.

For our part, we do not ask ourselves this question. It seems very clear to us that religiosity is advancing—here in Latin America, in the United States, in Japan, in the Arab world, and in the socialist camp: Cuba, Afghanistan, Poland, the U.S.S.R. Our question regarding this matter lies, rather, in the issue of whether the official, established religions will be able to adapt this psychosocial phenomenon to the new urban landscape, or whether they will be overwhelmed by it. It may happen that a diffuse religiosity will continue to grow in small, chaotic groups, without constituting a formal church, and if this is the case it will not be easy to grasp the real magnitude of this phenomenon.

Although the comparison is not entirely legitimate, a distant antecedent comes to mind: As Imperial Rome began to lose faith in her official religion, all manner of cults and superstitions began to arrive from every corner of the empire. And one of those insignificant groups eventually became a universal church.

Today it is clear that if it is to advance, this diffuse religiosity must somehow combine the landscape and the language of our times—a language of computer programming, technology, and space travel—with a new social Gospel.

Thank you very much.

II. Book Presentations

Guided Experiences

(*Experiencias Guiadas*)

El Ateneo, Madrid, Spain, November 3, 1989

On May 2, 1916, here in Madrid in El Ateneo (the Atheneum), Ortega introduced Bergson. On that occasion, Ortega explained that this society, El Ateneo, was an institution dedicated to the cultivation of and reverence for ideas. With that mission in mind, I would like to speak here tonight in this same hall, not about literature, as one would think is called for by the nature of the book we are presenting, not about the tales or stories of which this volume is composed, but rather about the ideas out of which these stories have arisen.

Of course, I'm not saying that when one speaks about a literary subject ideas are absent, but simply that typically the focus is on the aesthetic aspects of the work, though sometimes one will examine the content of the work while looking at its formal aspects. Often, the author may relate his or her life experiences, allowing us access to his or her biography, sensibilities, and perception of the world. What reason is there, then, for my speaking tonight about ideas? Simply because this book is the practical application of a theory of consciousness in which the *image,* as phenomenon of representation, has special importance. It is true that I will have to say a number of things first, especially for those of you who have not held in your hands the book that we will discuss tonight. In any case, these preliminaries need not impede the communicating of that structure of ideas, that theory which I mentioned.

Let's look first at the history of this work. Originally written in 1980, this book was revised in 1988, and just a few days ago it was published and made available for your consideration. At this point, I would like to read the introductory note by J. Valinsky, which says the following:

> The work consists of two parts. The first, "Tales," is a collection of thirteen stories that comprise the more dense and complex part of the work. The second part, "Playing with Images," includes nine descriptions that are simpler than those of the first part.
>
> This material may be viewed in various ways. From a superficial point of view, it may be seen as a series of short stories with happy endings, simple literary divertimenti. Another focus, however, reveals this work as a series of psychological practices based on literary forms. While all the stories are written in the first person, it should be noted that this "first person" is not the one habitually found in other writings. Rather than that of the author, the first person in this work is that of the reader—each story provides a different setting that serves as a frame for the reader to fill with his or her own life and concerns.
>
> As an aid, asterisks (*) appear at intervals throughout the text to mark pauses at key points that can help the reader—or listener—introduce, mentally, the images that transform a passive reader into an actor in and coauthor of each description. This original form also allows one person to read aloud (observing the aforementioned

pauses), while each listener imagines his or her own literary “knot.” This approach—the hallmark of these writings—would in more conventional stories destroy all plot sequence.

It should be noted that in every literary piece, the reader—or spectator in the case of plays, films, or television programs—can identify more or less fully with the characters, while recognizing, either at the time or later on, differences between the actor playing the role in the piece and the observer, who is “outside” the production and is none other than the spectator him or herself. However, in these writings quite the opposite occurs: The main character is at once the observer, agent, and recipient of the actions and emotions.

In any case, whether or not we find these “guided experiences” to our liking, we will at least recognize that we are in the presence of a new and innovative literary initiative, which is not something that happens every day.

That is the end of the note.

As we have seen, then, the book is composed of brief stories in which asterisks appear at critical points, indicating a pause in reading—or listening—and allowing one to insert at those points whatever images one deems most appropriate. In this way, the development of the story continues but is rendered more dynamic by the reader’s introduction of these new elements. Let’s look at the specific case of the first of these tales, titled “The Child”:

It is night, and I find myself in an amusement park. Everywhere I see mechanical rides, filled with light and movement, but I do not see any people.

Then I discover a child about ten years old, who is facing away from me. As I move closer, the youngster turns to look at me, and I realize it is myself when I was that age. (*)

Asterisk! That is to say, here we find an interruption, where, following the suggestions in the text, I am to insert myself, as an image, into the story. The story continues this way:

“What are you doing here?” I ask. The child tells me something about an injustice that has happened, and then begins to cry. To console the child, I promise that we’ll go on some rides, but the youngster insists on talking about the injustice. In order to understand the child better, I try to recall what happened to me at that age that was so unfair. (*)

Asterisk! From what I’ve said so far, I’m sure you can understand the mechanics of reading the guided experiences that make up the stories in this book. In addition, you will see that there is a common pattern in how all the guided experiences are constructed. First, there is an *entrance* to the theme and general setting of the scene; second, there is, in a manner of speaking, an *increase in “dramatic tension;”* third, we find the *representation of a life problem;* fourth, there is the denouement, an untying of the central knot or *resolution* of the problem; fifth, there is a *reduction in overall tension;* and sixth, there is a not-too-abrupt *exit* from the experience, generally retracing the previous steps of the story.

Let me say a little more about the way the situation presented in each story is framed, that is, the context in which each experience occurs. In order to place readers in a situation in which they can more easily make contact with themselves, it is necessary to distort the structure of time and space in the story, and this is done following the lessons we learn from our own

dreams. We need to help the reader free the dynamics of his or her images, avoiding the rationalizations that can prevent the story from flowing easily. If, at the same time, there is a destabilizing of the reader's corporal register, the sense of position of the reader's body in space, this will help the reader question anew these moments in his or her life, including future moments in the sense of actions that might yet be carried out. Let's look, then, at an example that illustrates this distortion and destabilization from the experience titled "The Rescue":

> I am in a car that is speeding down a large highway. In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk. The driver beside me is someone I've never seen before. In the back seat are two women and a man, who are also strangers to me. The car races onward, surrounded by other cars that are driving recklessly, as if their drivers are drunk or crazy.
>
> I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, *"Rex voluntas!"*
>
> Turning on the radio, which blares noisy static, I can faintly hear a weak metallic voice monotonously repeating, *"Rex voluntas, rex voluntas, rex voluntas."*
>
> The traffic slows, and by the roadside I see wrecked and overturned cars with fire spreading among them. We stop, and abandoning the car, join a sea of terrified people rushing toward the fields.
>
> Looking back through the smoke and flames, I see many hapless souls who are trapped and doomed, but I'm forced to keep running by the human stampede that pushes me along. Some of the people stumble to the ground, and amid this delirium I struggle in vain to reach a woman trying to shield her child as the mob tramples over them.
>
> The chaos and violence are spreading everywhere, so I make up my mind to move in a slightly diagonal direction that will let me escape the crowd; I aim toward some higher ground that diverts this mindless stampede. Many of the fallen clutch at my clothes, tearing them to shreds, but I notice that the crush of people around me is growing less.
>
> One man does break free of the mob and comes running toward me. His clothes are in tatters and his body is covered with wounds, yet I feel a great joy that he's been saved. On reaching me he clutches my arm, and yelling like a madman points frantically down the hill. He's speaking a language I do not understand, but I think he wants me to help rescue someone. I tell him to wait for a while—that right now it's impossible. I know he cannot understand me, and his desperation is tearing me apart. Then he tries to go back down, but just as he's leaving I trip him and he falls headlong. He lies sprawled on the ground, sobbing bitterly. For my part I realize that I've saved both his life and his conscience—his conscience because he did try to rescue someone, and his life by preventing his doomed attempt.
>
> Climbing higher, I reach a freshly plowed field. The earth is loose and furrowed. In the distance I hear gunfire, and think I know what is happening—hurriedly I leave. After a while, everything is silent and I stop once more. Looking back toward the city, I see a sinister glow.
>
> I feel the ground begin to shake beneath my feet, and a rumbling from the depths warns me of an imminent earthquake. Within moments I've lost my balance and find

myself lying on the ground. Curled on my side and gazing up at the sky, I'm overcome by waves of dizziness.

The earthquake passes, and I look up to see an enormous, blood-red moon.

The heat is unbearable and the air is filled with an acrid odor. Meanwhile, I'm still uncertain whether the day is just beginning or night is falling.

Sitting down, I hear a growing roar. Soon hundreds of aircraft fill the sky, passing overhead like deadly insects and disappearing toward some unknown destiny.

Nearby I come upon a large dog that is staring up at the moon. It begins to howl, almost like a wolf. I call out to it, and the animal approaches me timidly. When it reaches my side, I gently pet its bristling fur and see shivers running down its body.

The dog pulls away from me and begins to leave. I get to my feet and follow it, and we cross a rocky area until we reach a small stream. The thirsty animal rushes forward and eagerly begins to drink, but all at once draws back and falls over. Approaching the dog I touch it, and realize that it's dead.

I feel a new earthquake, which threatens to knock me over, but it subsides.

Turning around, I behold far off in the sky four enormous clouds advancing toward me with the muffled rumbling of thunder. The first cloud is white, the second is red, the third is black, and the fourth is yellow. And these clouds are like four armed horsemen riding on the storm, traveling across the heavens and laying waste to all life upon the earth.

I begin running to escape the approaching clouds, for I realize that if their rain touches me I'll be contaminated. As I run toward the highway, suddenly my path is blocked by a gigantic figure—towering over me I see a huge robot swinging a sword of fire in a menacing arc. I shout that I must keep going because the radioactive clouds are approaching, but the robot replies that it has been stationed here to prevent destructive people from entering; adding that it's armed with lasers, it warns me not to come any closer. I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life.

So I shout to the robot, "You must let me pass because I've done a good deed!"

"What is a good deed?" the robot asks.

"A constructive action, something that builds and contributes to life," I answer.

"Then tell me what you've done that's so good," the robot demands.

"I've saved a human being from certain death, and what's more, I've saved his conscience as well."

At once the giant robot stands aside, and I leap into the protected area just as the first drops of poisoned rain begin to fall.

Here I'll stop reading from this story, but there is also an endnote about this story that contains the following comments:

> The eeriness of the plot is achieved through the ambiguity of time ("In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk"); the contrast of place ("I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life"); the inability to communicate with other people and the Babel-like confusion of tongues ("I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange

language, *'Rex voluntas!'"*); and finally by leaving the protagonist at the mercy of uncontrollable forces—heat, earthquakes, strange astronomical phenomena, polluted water, a climate of war, an armed giant robot, and so on.

Time and again the protagonist's body is destabilized—it is pushed and shoved, it must walk across the soft, uneven ground of the freshly plowed field, it is knocked to the ground by an earthquake.

The aforementioned pattern in the framing of the situation is repeated in a number of guided experiences, each time with different images and each time stressing the particular problem or "knot" that is the focus of that story. For example, in the experience titled "My Greatest Mistake," everything revolves around a kind of misunderstanding, which is treated by presenting a confusion of perspectives. In turn, since this story involves an event in our past that we wish could be changed, that we wish had happened in a different way, temporal and spatial modifications are introduced to modify our perception of the phenomena, and these changes eventually transform the point of view from which we see our past. Thus, while it is not possible to modify the actions that occurred, it *is* possible to change the point of view from which we see them, and this allows the way that we structure or integrate those contents, those memories, to change for the better in significant ways. Let's look at part of that story:

I am standing before some sort of court. Every seat in the silent courtroom is filled, and I'm surrounded by a sea of stern faces. The court clerk adjusts his glasses and picks up a long document. Breaking the tremendous tension that fills the room, he solemnly pronounces, "It is the sentence of this court that the accused shall be put to death."

Immediately there is an uproar—some people applaud while others boo, and I see a woman faint. Finally an official manages to restore order in the courtroom.

Staring at me darkly, the clerk demands, "Does the accused have anything to say?" When I say that I do, everyone sits down. I ask for a glass of water, and after a brief commotion they bring me one. Raising the glass, I take a sip, and finishing with a loud and prolonged gargle, I exclaim, "That's it!"

Someone from the jury harshly demands, "What do you mean, 'That's it'?"

"That's it," I repeat. But to satisfy the juror, I say that the water here does taste excellent, much better than I expected, and continue with two or three other pleasantries of this sort.

The court clerk finishes reading the document with these words: "Accordingly, the sentence shall be carried out today: You will be abandoned in the desert without food or water—above all, without water. I have spoken!"

"What do you mean you have spoken?" I demand. Arching his eyebrows, the clerk only reaffirms, "What I have spoken, I have spoken!"

Soon I find myself riding in a fire truck through the middle of the desert, escorted by two firemen. We stop, and one of them says, "Get out!" As soon as I step down from the truck, the vehicle turns around and heads back the way it came. I watch it grow smaller and smaller as it moves off across the dunes.

Other events transpire in the story and finally the following occurs:

Now the storm has passed and the sun has set. In the twilight I see before me a whitish dome several stories high. Although I think it must be a mirage, I get to my feet

and make my way toward it. As I draw closer, I see that the structure is made of a smooth material, a shiny plastic perhaps inflated with air.

A man dressed in Bedouin garb greets me, and we enter the dome through a carpeted passageway. A door slides open, and I feel a refreshing rush of cool air. Once inside, I notice that everything is upside down—the ceiling is like a smooth floor from which things are suspended. I see round tables above us with their legs pointing up toward the ceiling. I see water falling downward in streams that curve and return upward and high overhead there are human forms seated upside down.

Noticing my astonishment, the Bedouin hands me a pair of glasses saying, “Try these on!” When I put on the glasses, everything is restored to its normal appearance—in front of me I see a large fountain shooting streams of water high into the air. The tables and all the other things are right side up, and everything is exquisitely coordinated in color and form.

I see the court clerk coming toward me, crawling on all fours. He says he feels terribly dizzy, so I explain to him that he’s seeing reality upside down and needs to remove his glasses. Taking them off, he stands up and says with a sigh, “Indeed, now everything is fine—except that I’m so nearsighted.” He goes on to say he has been searching for me in order to explain that there has been a most deplorable mistake, and I’m not the person who should have been put on trial at all. Immediately he leaves through a side door.

Walking a few steps, I find myself with a group of people seated in a circle on cushions. They are elders of both sexes, with varied racial features and attire. All of them have beautiful faces. Each time one of them begins to speak, I hear the sound of faraway gears, of gigantic machinery, of immense clocks. I hear intermittent thunder, the cracking of rocks, icebergs splitting off, the rhythmic roaring of volcanoes, the light impact of a gentle rain, the muffled beating of hearts—motor, muscle, life—and everything in perfect harmony, a majestic symphony of sounds.

The Bedouin hands me a pair of headphones, saying, “Try these on, they translate.” Putting them on, I clearly hear a human voice. I realize it is the same symphony of one of the elders, now translated for my clumsy ear. This time as he opens his mouth I hear, “We are the hours, we are the minutes, we are the seconds. We are the various forms of time. Because a mistake was made with you, we will give you the opportunity to begin your life anew. But from what point do you wish to start again? Perhaps from your birth, or perhaps from just before your first failure. Reflect on this.” (*)

Asterisk! And so on.

Here I should add some further comments with respect to the type of images that are used, because while one may have the impression that all the descriptions involve a strong visual component, it happens that many people tend to favor a form of representation that instead is basically auditory, or kinesthetic, or coenesthetic, or perhaps a mixture. In this regard I would like to read a few paragraphs from a more recent work, an essay titled “Psychology of the Image” from the book *Contributions to Thought*. It reads as follows:

> Psychologists through the ages have made extensive lists dealing with perceptions and sensations, and today, with the discovery of new neuroreceptors, they have begun to talk about thermoceptors and baroceptors, as well as internal detectors of acidity, alkalinity, and so forth.

> To the sensations corresponding to the external senses we will add those that correspond to diffuse senses such as the kinesthetic (movement and corporal posture) and coenesthetic (register of temperature, pain, and so on—that is, the register of the intrabody in general) which, even when explained in terms of an internal tactile sense, cannot be reduced to that.

For our purposes today this quotation is sufficient, even though we do not pretend with it to exhaust all possible registers that correspond to the internal senses and the multiple combinations of perception between and among them. What we need to do now is to establish parallels between the representations and perceptions that are generically classified as "internal" and those termed "external." It is unfortunate that discussions of *representation* have so often been limited to visual images and that spatiality is almost always taken to refer to the visual, when in fact auditory perceptions and representations also denote sources of stimuli that may be localized in some "place." The same thing also happens with regard to perceptions and representations of touch, smell, and taste, as well as those related to the position of the body (kinesthesia) and the phenomena of the intrabody (coenesthesia). Since 1943, laboratory observations have shown that some individuals have a propensity for non-visual images. This led W. Grey Walter in 1967 to develop his classification of distinct types of imaginative contents. Irrespective of the accuracy of that formulation, the idea began to be taken seriously among psychologists that the recognition of one's body in space or the memory of an object could often be based on something besides visual images. Indeed, psychologists began to take seriously the case of perfectly normal subjects who described a sort of "blindness" with respect to visual representation. No longer was it possible after these studies to consider visual images as the nucleus of the system of representation, casting other forms of imaging into the dustbin of "eidetic disintegration," or indeed into the field of literature, where it is only idiots and the mentally retarded who say things like this character in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury:*

> I squatted there, holding the slipper. I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark.

To return, then, to our comments on *Guided Experiences,* I think we can agree that even when the guided experiences in this book are presented in a way that is predominantly visual, anyone can adapt them to his or her own system of representation. Furthermore, some of the guided experiences are clearly based on other types of images. This is the case, for example, in "The Creature," as you can see from this brief passage:

> It is night, and I find myself in total darkness. Somewhere nearby is the edge of a cliff. Groping ahead with my foot, I can feel uneven ground that is covered with vegetation and rocks. I also sense the presence of the creature that has always provoked in me a special feeling of terror and disgust. There may be one of them, or there may be many—but I'm certain that something is relentlessly drawing near.
>
> A ringing in my ears, at times mingling with a faraway wind, contrasts with the utter silence. My wide-open eyes cannot see a thing. My heart is pounding, my breathing is shallow, and my dry mouth has a bitter taste.
>
> Something is approaching—what is creeping up behind me, making my scalp bristle and sending cold chills up my spine?

My knees feel weak, and if something grabs me or jumps on me from behind I'll be completely defenseless. I'm paralyzed—all I can do is wait.

Let's also look at another case, one that involves not only different types of images but also the translation of one system of representation into another. This is part of the guided experience called "The Festival":

Lying in a bed, I gradually become aware that I'm in a hospital room. Faintly I hear the dripping of a faucet. I try to move my arms and legs and then my head, but they don't respond. It's an effort just to keep my eyes open.

The ceiling is smooth and white. As each drop of water drips from the faucet, a ray of light flashes across the ceiling. One drop, one ray. Then another. Then many rays, and after this I see waves of light. The ceiling keeps on changing with the rhythm of my heart, perhaps an effect of the arteries in my head as blood pulses through them.

Now the rhythm outlines the face of a young person.

Later on in this same experience we move beyond visual perception, which becomes included in a more complex system of representation and is translated into other perceptions and therefore other representations:

I fix my attention on a flower, connected to its stem by a slender stalk that, within transparent skin, gleams a deep green. I reach out my hand, lightly running my finger along the polished fresh stem, barely disturbed by tiny knobs. Moving up through emerald leaves, I come to the petals, which open in a multicolored explosion. Petals like stained glass in a solemn cathedral, petals like rubies, petals like embers awakening into flame—and in this dance of hues, I feel the flower lives as if a part of me. (*)

The flower, disturbed by my touch, releases a sleepy drop of dew, barely clinging to the tip of a leaf. As it falls the drop vibrates, forming an oval as it lengthens. And now in the emptiness it flattens out, only to become round again, falling in endless time—falling, falling, through endless space. Finally landing on a mushroom's cap, the drop rolls like heavy mercury, sliding to the edge. There, in a spasm of freedom, it hurls itself into a tiny pool, raising a tempest of waves that bathe an island of marble. (*)

Ahead the festival continues, and I know that this music connects me with that young woman gazing at her clothes, and that young man leaning against a tree and petting a blue cat.

I know that I have lived all this before, and I have known the tree's jagged outline, and the sharply defined volume of each thing.

In the velvet butterflies that flutter around me, I recognize the warmth of lips and the fragility of sweet dreams.

And so on.

In these experiences, images are not only located in front of the protagonist or in the surroundings, but may also be inside the subject. We should note here that there are dreams in which the dreamer sees him or herself in the scene among other objects—that is, with a look that is "external." But it also happens that the dreamer will sometimes see the scene from his or her own point of view, almost the way it would be seen when awake, in vigil. In these cases, the dreamer's look has moved inside, is more internalized. In our representations right now—in

everyday representation—we see things that are located outside us precisely as *external* to us; that is, we look out from "behind" a tactile, coenesthetic boundary given by the register of our eyes and face and head. Thus, when I close my eyes and represent what I have previously seen, I experience these things as "outside," even though I am looking at them *not* outside, in perception, but rather *inside* myself, within my space of representation. In any case, my *look* is separate from the object, and I see the object as though it were outside myself, even though I am in fact representing it "inside my head," so to speak.

In the example from "The Child" that we considered earlier, I see myself when I was little. In reality, I see the child from the register—the internal sensation—that I have of myself today, in which I recognize myself. That is, I see the child as outside myself, but from my present *inner look*. The child (which is me many years ago) speaks to me now of an injustice that took place long ago. In order to know what the child is talking about, I make an effort to remember (the I of today tries, not the child) what happened to me when I was that child (that which-I-once-was). As I do so, my *look* moves deeper "inside" me to my own recollections, and the child I see is outside the direction of my recollection. So when I encounter myself in a scene from my childhood, how do I recognize myself as truly myself? It must surely be through a *look* that is external to me, but internal with reference to what is external, in this case the child in the amusement park.

This raises a number of interesting questions, but we can simplify the subject if we remember that we differentiate "outside" and "inside" simply by virtue of the difference given by the tactile-coenesthetic boundary of eyes, face, and head, and this is what makes it possible to speak of some representations as "outside" and others as "inside." Now that this is clear, let's consider some examples of differences in the location of *looks* and *scenes.* In the experience titled "The Chimney Sweep" we find the following:

> After a while the Chimney Sweep rises and picks up a very long, slightly curved pair of forceps. Standing in front of me he says, "Open your mouth!" When I do, I feel him insert the long instrument into my mouth, and it seems to reach all the way down into my stomach. To my surprise, however, I find that it's not too uncomfortable.
>
> Suddenly he shouts, "I've caught it!" and little by little he begins pulling out the forceps. At first it feels like something is tearing apart inside of me. But then I feel a pleasant tingling sensation, as if something malignant is being pulled loose from my lungs and internal organs, something that has been stuck there for a long, long time. (*)

Here it is clear that we are working with coenesthetic registers, images from the intrabody. But when these are imagined as "outside" (as with what is perceived as "outside" in daily life), they produce effects in the intrabody. The modification of the scene and one's *look* follow the mechanics that we observed in the story of the child, except that in this case what we imagine as "outside" is not like the "child" that we considered visually. Rather, it's a sort of coenesthetic register that's placed "outside," not in the sense that I feel something in my interior and now that feeling is outside my body, but rather that now what I feel in my intrabody is external to my *look* (i.e., outside of a new coenesthetic register that is even deeper, even more internal). Without this mechanism for introducing change in the position and point of view of both one's *look* and the scene being viewed, many phenomena of daily life would not be possible. How could an external object produce repugnance in me simply through my looking at it? How could I "feel" horror when another person is cut? How could I feel solidarity with another's pain, or with his or her suffering or pleasure?

Let's examine a few paragraphs from the experience titled "My Ideal":

I am walking through a fairground filled with exhibition halls and displays, and I see many children playing on high-tech mechanical rides.

I come upon a giant figure made of some solid material. It stands upright, and its large head is painted in bright colors. There is a ladder extending up to its mouth, which the little ones climb to reach the enormous opening. Whenever one enters, the mouth gently closes, and soon the child pops out the back of the giant, coming down a slide and landing in the sand below. One by one the children go in and come out, as a song flows from the giant:

See Gargantua gobble up the children,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

I decide to climb up the short ladder. As I enter the huge mouth, I meet an attendant who tells me, "Children go down the slide, but grownups use the elevator."

The attendant continues the explanation as our elevator descends through a transparent tube. Soon I say that I think we're probably at ground level by now.

"That's right," replies the attendant, "although we're still only passing through the esophagus. The rest of the giant's body is below ground, unlike the children's giant, which is completely on the surface. You see," my guide informs me, "there are actually two Gargantuas in one—one for children, and another one for grownups. We've already passed the diaphragm, and soon we'll stop at a very pleasant place—look, the elevator door is opening and I can show you the stomach. Would you like to get out here? As you can see, this modern restaurant serves delicious food from all over the world."

The proposal of "external" images acting upon internal representations is clearly visible in the experience titled "The Miner." Here is how this story goes:

Suddenly I yell at the top of my lungs as the floor gives way beneath me, dragging me down in its collapse.

I plunge downward until a sharp jerk on the rope at my waist abruptly breaks my fall; I'm left dangling absurdly at the end of the rope like some muddy pendulum.

My fall has been stopped just above a carpeted floor, and I see before me an elegant room flooded with light. I glimpse some sort of laboratory filled with enormous bookshelves, but my predicament is so pressing that I'm completely absorbed in trying to free myself.

With my left hand I grasp the taut rope above; with my right hand I release the buckle fastening the rope around my waist, and tumble softly onto the carpet.

"What manners, my friend, what manners!" says a high-pitched voice behind me. I spin around and stop short.

Standing before me is a little man, scarcely taller than my knee. Except for his slightly pointed ears, he could be described as very well-proportioned. He is dressed in bright colors, yet in the unmistakable style of a miner.

I feel at once ridiculous and dismayed when he offers me a glass of punch. It's quite refreshing, however, so I drink it straight down.

Now the little man cups his hands before his mouth and makes the plaintive cry I recognize so well. On hearing it I'm outraged, and demand to know just what he means by tricking me this way. To my bewilderment, he replies that thanks to this experience, in the future my digestion will be much improved.

This extraordinary little character goes on to explain to me how the rope squeezing my waist and stomach during my fall has done me a world of good, as did the journey I made through the tunnel crawling on my elbows. He concludes his strange remarks by asking me whether the expression "You are in the bowels of the earth" means anything to me.

I answer that this is just a figure of speech, but the little man assures me that in this case it holds a great truth. Then he adds, "You are in your own bowels. When something goes wrong in their viscera, people can think all kinds of crazy thoughts. In turn, these negative thoughts can harm their internal organs. So from now on you must take good care of yourself in this regard. If you don't, I'll begin walking around, and you'll feel sharp pains and all kinds of internal discomfort. And I have colleagues who are in charge of other parts of your body like your lungs, your heart, and so on."

Having said this, the little man begins walking around on the walls and ceiling. As he does so, I feel twinges of discomfort near my stomach, liver, and kidneys. (*)

Afterwards the little man sprays me from head to toe with a stream of water from a golden hose, thoroughly cleansing me of all the mud, and in an instant I'm dry. I stretch out on a spacious sofa and begin to relax. Rhythmically the little man passes a soft brush over my waist and abdomen, producing a remarkable sensation of relaxation in these areas. I realize that when discomfort is relieved in my stomach, liver, and kidneys, my ideas and feelings change for the better. (*)

I feel a strong vibration and find myself back in the elevator, rising toward the surface of the earth.

In this guided experience, the little man proves to be a true expert in the theory of the coenesthetic image, though naturally he doesn't tell us how it's possible for an image to be connected with the intrabody and to act upon it.

Earlier we saw, with some difficulty, that the perception of external objects serves as a basis for the elaboration of images, and that this allows us to re-present what has earlier been presented to the senses. We saw that in this re-presentation, there occur modifications, changes in the location and point of view of the observer's *look* with regard to a given scene, and we asked ourselves about the connection between the *perception* of an object or scene that we find disgusting or repulsive and our *internal reactions* to this perception. That is, we are talking about sensations in the intrabody, which then serve as the basis for new representations that are also "internal."

So here we are, filled with questions that have not been fully answered, and I fear that with so little time remaining it is here that we will have to end this talk. But first I would like to add one or two thoughts.

Insofar as we continue to consider the mental image to be only a simple copy of perception; insofar as we continue to believe that consciousness in general maintains a passive attitude before the world (acting only as some sort of reflection of it), we will neither be able to answer the foregoing questions nor others that are truly fundamental.

For us, the *image* is an active form, placing the consciousness (as structure) in-the-world. The image can act on the body and the body-in-the-world because of *intentionality,* which is directed outside itself and does not simply correspond to a *for-itself* or some "natural," reflected, and mechanical *in-itself.* The image acts within a temporo-spatial structure and within an internal "spatiality" that has thus been termed the "space of representation." The various and complex functions that the image carries out depend in general on the position it occupies within that spatiality. A fuller justification of what I am explaining here would, of course, require an understanding of the associated theory of consciousness, and for that I refer you to the essay "Psychology of the Image" in the book *Contributions to Thought*.

If, however, through these "literary divertimenti" as they have been called in the introductory note, I have been able to help you see the application in practice of a broad conception, then I have not failed to do what I promised at the outset of my presentation when I said that I was going to talk about these *Guided Experiences,* not from a literary point of view but from the standpoint of the ideas that have given rise to this literary expression.

Thank you very much.

Humanize the Earth

(*Humanizar la Tierra*)

Scandinavia Center, Reykjavik, Iceland, November 13, 1989

Humanize the Earth is in fact a collection of three works. The first of these, *The Inner Look,* was completed in 1972 and revised in 1988. The second, *The Internal Landscape,* was completed in 1981 and revised in 1988. And the last, *The Human Landscape,* was written in 1988. These are, then, three productions from different periods that are related to one another in a number of ways, as we will soon see. But they are also conceived sequentially—they build upon one another. For the moment, I ask you to accompany me in considering the formal aspects of the book.

These three works are written in poetic prose, and divided into chapters, which in turn are made up of paragraphs, often numbered. This division into paragraphs, combined with the direct address so often apparent in them, along with some of the subject matter they deal with, has led some critics to situate this work within the genre of mystical literature. While this classification does not offend me in any way, I do not think that the elements that have been cited are sufficient to justify it.

The first criterion used by these critics—segmentation into numbered paragraphs—is indeed common to many works of mystical literature. We see this in the numbered verses of the Bible, in the suras of the Qur'an, in the Yasnas and Fargards of the Avesta, as well as the divisions of the Upanishads. But we should also note that there are many other works of mystical literature that do *not* conform to this type of textual organization, while there are texts from many other fields—those of a legal nature, for example—that do. Indeed, civil and penal codes, along with procedures and regulations of many kinds, not to mention other documents of that general nature, are typically organized in numbered sections, subsections, articles, paragraphs, clauses, and so forth. Much the same thing is seen today in works in the fields of logic and mathematics. If one examines Russell's *Principia* or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* for example, one will surely agree that they are not exactly *mystical* works.

Let's take the second criterion, then: direct address, that is, discourse formalized into imperative statements (as opposed to declarative ones) that cannot be subjected to the test of truth. While this form often occurs in works of religious literature, it is also found in works that are not religious in nature. Moreover, in the work at hand, the sentences or phrases are not simply imperative but are also often discursive, giving readers an opportunity to examine their own experience and thus test the validity of what is being said. What I mean to say is that if this work is being classified, elliptically, as "mystical," when in fact what is meant is that it is "dogmatic," then the criteria given for classifying it in this way do not seem to be sufficient.

The third criterion, the subjects addressed in the book, would seem to establish connections with religion. And, in fact, such subjects as faith, meditation, meaning in life, and so on, have often been addressed by religions, but of course also by thinkers and poets concerned with the fundamental questions of human beings as they find themselves facing problems in everyday existence.

It has also been said that this work is “philosophical” in character, but anyone who takes a moment to leaf through its pages will see that it bears no resemblance to a text of that kind, much less to a treatise organized with systematic rigor. (“The Human Landscape,” the third work of this collection, is the one that might most strongly incline some to that error of classification.) Others have seen the book as a sociological or psychological text. But in reality, all of that has been very far from my intention in writing these works. What is certainly true is that throughout the collection there are indeed statements, opinions, and expressions that fall within the scope of all those disciplines. And how could it be otherwise, when one is attempting to address the broad range of situations within which human life unfolds? So then, to say that some subjects are treated from a psychological, sociological, philosophical, or mystical perspective would be entirely appropriate, and I would certainly accept that statement. But to classify the work as belonging exclusively to any one of those forms seems to me incorrect.

The truth is, I would be pleased if people would simply say that this is a work written without concern for narrow categories and that it deals with the broadest and most general themes that people encounter throughout the course of their lives. And if someone were to insist that I further categorize or define it, I would simply say it is a meditation on human life written in poetic prose.

Having come to the end of this brief discussion of formal issues, let’s proceed to the heart of the matter.

The first work, titled “The Inner Look,” deals with *meaning in life.* The principal theme addressed is the state of *contradiction*, and the work shows clearly that the register one has of contradiction in life is *suffering,* and that overcoming mental suffering is possible in the measure that one orients one’s life toward non-contradictory actions. Non-contradictory actions are those that go beyond the personal and are constructively directed toward other people. In summary: *The Inner Look* speaks of overcoming mental suffering by launching oneself into the social world, the world of other people, so long as that action is registered as non-contradictory. The text is rendered a bit obscure by the numerous allegories and symbols that appear—the paths, dwellings, and strange landscapes through which people pass according to the vital situation in which they find themselves.

One of the most important of these allegories is that of the tree, that ancient *Tree of Life* that appears in the Kabbalah and in the creation myths of the Makiritare, the indigenous Amazonian people who follow the Yekuaná cult. This is the *Tree of the World* that connects the sky with the earth and that your own Icelandic *Vlüspá* calls *Yggdrasill.* Thus, in “The Inner Look,” there is a kind of map of the inner states in which a person may find him or herself throughout the various moments of life. The states of confusion, desire for revenge, and despair, for example, are allegorized in the locations of the paths and dwellings through which one journeys in the “Yggdrasill” of *The Inner Look;* but one also encounters the way out of those contradictory situations: hope, the future, joy—in sum, the state of unity or non-contradiction.

In this work we also find a chapter dedicated to the “Principles of Valid Action.” These are a set of recommendations, sayings that enable one to remember certain laws of behavior that contribute to a life of unity and meaning. Not escaping the allegorical style of the entire work, these Principles have a metaphorical character. Here we may cite a few examples: “If day and night, summer and winter, are well with you, you have surpassed the contradictions”; “Do not oppose a great force. Retreat until it weakens, then advance with resolution.” We find recommendations of this kind in the *Hávamál,* too, for example, in Verse 64:

A wise man will not overweening be,
And stake too much on his strength;
When the mighty are met to match their strength,
'Twill be found that first is no one.

The Principles in *The Inner Look* are, in reality, laws of behavior of a sort, although they are conceived not as moral or legal prescriptions but rather as constants, descriptions of how forces will function in action or reaction depending on the placement, the location, of the person who acts.

The second work, "The Internal Landscape," continues in the style of the first, but with less emphasis on allegories and symbols. The description turns outward, toward the world of cultural values, and contains increasingly specific references to the social sphere. In the early sections of this second work, we read: "Leap over your suffering, and it will not be the abyss but life that grows within you. There is no passion, idea, or human deed that is not linked to the abyss. Therefore, let us turn to the only thing that deserves our attention: the abyss and that which overcomes it."

This apparently dualistic statement makes clear certain fundamental concerns with the *growth of life* and the *annihilation of life.* Annihilation appears to take on a certain substantiality when it is termed the "abyss," but this is merely poetic license, for to speak of the nihilization of being, or the "crossing out" of being as Heidegger does, would cause an irreparable break in style. We are not speaking of the abyss in terms of substance, then, but rather in terms of an annihilation or darkening of meaning in human life. It is clear that the first dualistic effect disappears when we understand the concept of abyss as non-being, as non-life, rather than as an entity in itself. The concept of *abyss* was chosen for its psychological implications, since it evokes internal registers of the kind of vertigo associated with the contradictory sensation of repulsion and attraction. This attraction toward nothingness leads to suicide or mindless destructive fury, and it can mobilize the nihilism of an individual, a group, or an entire civilization. This is not *anxiety* as in Kierkegaard or *nausea* as in Sartre, in the sense of a choice at a crossroads or a passive disintegration of meaning. Rather, it is vertigo and *attraction toward* the nothing as an *activity-toward-destruction,* a kind of motor of personal and social events that wrestles with life for preeminence and power. Thus, if the human being has the freedom to choose, then it is possible for people to modify those conditions that would portend catastrophe if left to follow their mechanical development. If, on the other hand, human freedom is only a pious myth, then it does not matter what individuals or nations decide, since events are already foreordained to develop mechanically either in the direction of the growth of life, or instead toward catastrophe, nothingness, non-meaning.

This work affirms the *freedom* of human life, freedom within certain conditions, but ultimately freedom. Moreover, it says that the meaning of life is in essence liberty, and that this liberty rejects the "absurd," rejects the "given," even when the given is Nature itself. It is this struggle against the given, against pain and suffering, against the adversities that Nature has imposed on the human being, that has allowed the development of society and civilization. Human life has not grown due to pain and suffering, but on the contrary has equipped itself precisely to *defeat* them. The decision to expand human liberty reaches beyond the individual, and since this being has no fixed nature but rather follows a historical and social dynamic, it is the individual who must take responsibility and act for society and all human beings. Following this, Chapter VII of *The Internal Landscape* says: "Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings,

transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens." It goes on to say: "I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.… You will not fulfill your mission if you do not apply your energies to vanquishing pain and suffering in those around you. And if through your action they in turn take up the task of humanizing the world, you will have opened their destiny toward a new life."

In the final analysis, *The Internal Landscape* deals with meaning in life as a struggle against nihilism inside of each human being and in the life of society; furthermore, it exhorts people to convert this life into activity and militancy in the service of the humanization of the world. As you can understand, this work does not speak of solutions that are merely individual and personal, since there is no such thing as a purely *personal* solution in a world that is *social* and *historical.* Those who believe that their individual, personal problems can be solved through some sort of introspection or psychological technique make a crucial error, for we are only able to move toward solutions thanks to action directed toward the world, that is, through meaningful action directed toward other people. And if someone should insist that a certain psychological technique has its usefulness, this work would seem to reply that its worth can be measured only from the perspective of action directed toward the world, that is, from the perspective of whether or not that technique is something that *supports coherent action.*

Finally, this text deals with the problem of *time,* and it does so allegorically. This is time that appears in its true temporality—that is, where past, present, and future act simultaneously—and not as in naive perception or those numerous philosophical theories where time has no structure but instead is viewed as a succession of instants flowing infinitely toward a "past" and a "future" without touching one another. The work presents *lived* time as a structure in which everything that has happened in my life acts simultaneously along with all that is taking place with me at the present moment and all that I imagine may happen to me as possibility, as "project," in the more or less foreseeable future. Although that future presents itself to me as a "not yet," it determines my present through the project that I launch toward it from my now, from my "at this moment." The idea of time as *structure* and not as a simple succession of independent instants is an intuition that human beings have had since antiquity, though it has most often been expressed in the form of myths and legends. Thus, we read in your own Icelandic *Poetic Edda* in "The Seeress's Prophecy":

> I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,
> a high tree, soaked with shining loam;
> from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
> ever green, it stands over the well of fate.
>
> From there come three girls, knowing a great deal,
> from the lake which stands under the tree;
> *Fated* one is called, *Becoming* another—
> they carved on wooden slips—*Must-be* the third;
> they set down laws, they chose lives,
> for the sons of men the fates of men.

Thus, past, present, and future are not successions of instants, but structural determinants of situation. And so in *The Internal Landscape* we read the following, in which the rider speaks:

> "Strange encounters these, where the old man suffers for his short future, seeking refuge in his long past; the middle-aged man suffers for his present situation, seeking refuge in what has happened or what will happen, depending on whether he grasps before or behind him; and the youth suffers because his short past nips at his heels, spurring on his flight toward a long future.
>
> "And yet I recognize my own face in the faces of all three, and it seems to me that all human beings, whatever their age, can move through these times and see in them phantoms that do not exist. Or does that offense of my youth still exist today? Does my coming old age exist today? Does my death already dwell here today in this darkness?
>
> "All suffering steals in through memory, imagination, or perception. But it is thanks to these same three pathways that thoughts, affections, and human deeds exist. So it is that even while these pathways are necessary for life, if suffering contaminates them they also become channels of destruction."

The third work, "The Human Landscape," dedicates its opening chapters to a clarification of the meaning of the ideas of *landscape* and the *looks* with which one gazes upon that landscape. It questions the way in which we look at the world and understand its established values. This work also examines the significance of one's own body and the bodies of others, and it examines *subjectivity* and the curious phenomenon of the appropriation of the subjectivity of others. It is, further, a study (divided into chapters) of *intention:* intention in education, intention in the story that is told of History, intention in ideologies, intention in violence, in Law, in the State, and in Religion. It is not a work, as I have said, that is simply polemical; rather, it proposes new models in each area that it criticizes. *The Human Landscape* attempts to ground action in the world, reorienting meanings and interpretations regarding values and institutions that might seem to be "givens."

With respect to the concept of *landscape,* let me say that it is the cornerstone of our system of thought, as can be seen in other, more recent works such as "Psychology of the Image" and "Historiological Discussions" in *Contributions to Thought*. In the book we are concerned with today, the idea of *landscape* is more modestly explained, and within the context of a work with no pretensions to rigorous thought. So it is that the work *The Human Landscape* begins with the following: "External landscape is what we perceive of things, while internal landscape is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world. These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality."

And who better to understand these ideas than you Icelanders? Although human beings are always to be found in a landscape, that does not mean that they are always *aware* of this. But the landscape becomes a living datum for people when the world in which they live presents itself in full contrast as a contradiction impossible to bear, as unstable equilibrium *par excellence*. The inhabitants of vast deserts or infinite plains have in common the experience that there, in the distance on the horizon, the earth merges with the skies so gradually, so subtly, that finally one cannot tell what is earth and what is sky… only empty continuity appears before the eyes. And there are other places where utmost ice clashes with utmost fire, glacier with volcano, island with sea that surrounds it; where water erupts furiously from the earth in geysers hurling skyward; where all is contrast, all is finitude, and the eye turns upward to the immobile stars, seeking repose. But then the very skies begin to move, the gods dance and change

shape and color in gigantic aurora borealis. And the finite eye then turns back upon itself, generating dreams of harmonious worlds, eternal dreams—dreams that sing histories of worlds lost in hope of the world to come.

And so I believe those places are landscapes where every inhabitant is a poet who may not recognize him or herself as such, every inhabitant a traveler who carries his or her vision to other places. That being the case, then in some measure and in some form all human beings have something of the Icelander about them, because their original landscape always imposes itself on their perceptual vision, because all of us see not only what is there before us, but our comparisons and even the discovery of the new are based on what we have already known. Thus, we are dreaming even as we gaze at things, and then later we take them as though they were reality itself.

But the concept is even broader, since *landscape* is not only that which is natural, that which appears before our eyes; it is also that which is *human,* that which is *social.* Every person interprets other people from within his or her own biography, investing the other with more than what is perceived. That being the case, we never see in the reality of the other, what the other *is* in him or herself; rather, we have of the other a schema, an idea, an interpretation, that arises out of our own internal landscape. One's internal landscape is superimposed on the external landscape, which is not only natural but also social and human. Clearly, over time that society continues to change, and the generations succeed one another, and when a generation's time comes to act it does so trying to impose values and interpretations that have been formed in an earlier moment. This can go relatively well in periods of historical stability, but in times like the present, of tremendous dynamism and change, the gap between the generations widens alarmingly as the world changes before our very eyes.

Toward what is our look to be directed? What must we learn to see? It is not surprising that in these times the idea of "turning to a new way of thinking" is becoming more popular. Today, one must think fast because things are moving faster all the time, and what we took as late as yesterday to be immutable reality we find is no longer so today. And so, friends, in today's world we can no longer think from our landscape if this landscape does not become dynamic and universal, if it does not become valid for all human beings. We need to understand that the concepts of *landscape* and *look* can serve to help us advance toward that much-heralded "new way of thinking" demanded by this ever-accelerating process of planetarization, of converging diversity moving toward a *universal human nation.*

To return to the third work, "The Human Landscape," let me say that just as the themes of institutions, law, and the state are relevant in the formation of the human landscape, so are the reigning ideologies, the education that people receive, as well as their conception of the historical moment in which they live. This third work speaks of all those things, not simply in order to criticize their harmful aspects, but above all in order to propose a particular way of observing them, in order to help the *look* seek other objects, in order to *learn to see* in a new way.

To conclude these comments, let me add that the three works that make up the body of *Humanize the Earth* are three moments arrayed in a sequence extending from the most profound interiority, the world of dreams and symbols, outward to the external and human landscapes. They are a journey, a shifting of the point of view, beginning from the most intimate and personal and concluding with an opening to the interpersonal, social, and historical world.

Thank you very much.

Contributions to Thought

(*Contribuciones al Pensamiento*)

San Martín Cultural Center, Buenos Aires, October 4, 1990

Commenting on my recently published book, *Contributions to Thought,* would seem to be a rather technical undertaking. And while that is certainly the type of approach this material calls for, I feel I should make it clear that I will try in today's brief presentation to limit my comments to highlighting the principal problems and questions treated in the text, without excessive rigor.

As you may know, this work consists of two essays: "Psychology of the Image" and "Historiological Discussions." As these titles indicate, these essays are reflections on topics that would seem to fall within the fields of psychology and historiography, respectively. And as we will see, these two essays are connected by their shared objective of laying the groundwork for the construction of a general theory of human action, a theory that at the present time lacks sufficient foundation. When I speak of a *theory of action,* I am not speaking simply of an understanding of human labor, as in the praxiology of Kotarbinski, Skolimowski, or the Polish school in general, though they have the merit of having dealt extensively with the subject. Rather, these essays are an attempt to understand the phenomenon of the *origin* of human action, its significance and meaning. Of course, some may object that human action requires no theoretical justification; that action is, in fact, the antipode of theory; that the urgencies of the moment are primarily practical ones; and that the results of action are measured in terms of concrete achievements. Finally, they may maintain that this is the time for neither theories nor ideologies, since both have already demonstrated their failure and definitive collapse, clearing the way at last for concrete reality itself—a way that should lead straight to the simple choice of how to achieve the most effective action.

This patchwork of objections belies an underlying pragmatism which, as we know, is a way of thinking employed every day by that anti-ideological stance which would submit the value of any proof to "reality" itself. But the defenders of this attitude tell us nothing about this so-called "reality" that they are invoking, or the parameters that they are using to measure the "effectiveness" of a given action. Because, if the concept of "reality" is reduced to nothing more than crude perceptual verification, then we remain under the influence of a superstition that science, at every step of its progress, has shown to be false.

It seems reasonable to ask as a minimum that those who invoke the criteria of the "effectiveness of an action," explain their criteria. Is the supposed success of that action to be measured in terms of immediate results on the basis of only the action itself, or is it to be measured with an eye to the consequences of that action, that is, on those effects that continue even after the action itself is completed? If it is only the first of these criteria that these pragmatists affirm, then there is no way to see how one action is connected to another. This then leaves the way open for incoherence, or to contradiction between our action at moment *B* and our previous action at moment *A*. If, on the other hand, there are continuing consequences to action, then it is clear that at a given moment *A* an action can be successful whereas at moment *B* it is no longer so.

At the risk of digressing and even of lowering the level of this presentation, I feel that I must respond, if only briefly, to this ideology that pretends not to be one, this view of things that, however flawed its argument, has gained a certain hold over public belief, and can thus lead to an unthinking prejudice against ideas such as those we'll be talking about today.

We appreciate the value of theoretical formulations relating to the problem of human action, and indeed frame our ideas within the array of existing ideological positions—taking "ideology" to mean any complex of thought, scientific or not, that is articulated into a system of interpretation of a given reality. Yet from another perspective, I would claim a complete independence from those theories that, born in the nineteenth century, have demonstrated their failure not only in a practical sense but also, and above all, as theory. Thus, the collapse of those nineteenth-century ideologies in no way diminishes, but quite the contrary makes all the more important the new conceptions taking shape today.

In addition, I would say that both "the end of ideologies" heralded by Daniel Bell in the sixties and "the end of history" more recently announced by Fukuyama correspond to outmoded perceptions, remaining closed in a debate that in ideological terms had already been exhausted in the fifties—that is, long before recent spectacular political events so shocked those who, hypnotized as they were by their assumptions of practical success, took only belated notice of the march of history. That is why this worn-out pragmatism—whose roots we find in the Metaphysical Club of Boston around 1870, and which William James and Charles Peirce set forth with their characteristic intellectual modesty—has also long since failed in ideological terms. All that's left now is to watch the amazing events that will soon bring to an end those assumptions about the "end of history" and the "end of ideologies."

Now that the objective of this book is clear—that is, to lay the foundation for the construction of a general theory of human action—let us go on to the most important points of the first essay, "Psychology of the Image." This essay attempts to establish the basis for a hypothesis that posits consciousness as not simply the product or reflection of the action of one's surroundings. Rather, it holds consciousness as something that, taking the conditions imposed by the surroundings, constructs an image or complex of images that are capable of mobilizing human action toward the world and, through this action, modifying the world. The one who produces the action is in turn modified by that action, and in that constant feedback there emerges the structure subject-world, and not two separate terms that only occasionally interact. Therefore, when we speak here of "consciousness," we are doing so simply in accordance with the psychological focus imposed by the theme of the image, even though we understand consciousness to be the moment of interiority in the opening of human life in-the-world. It follows, then, that the term "consciousness" should be understood in the context of concrete existence, and not separate from it as is often the case in certain schools of psychology.

An important aspect of the work we are commenting upon today is its treatment of the phenomena of *representation* in their relationship with *spatiality,* precisely because it is thanks to representation that the human body can move and therefore act in the world in its characteristic manner. If we found reflection-based explanations convincing, we would have at least partially solved the problem, but there would remain the problem of the deferred response to stimuli—that is, the response that is postponed—and this demands a broader explanation. Furthermore, if we accept a variation in which the subject makes a decision to act in one direction and not another, then the concept of reflection becomes so diluted that in the end it explains nothing.

If we were to seek antecedents for the study of consciousness-become-behavior we would find them in the works of several scholars and thinkers, among whom Descartes stands out. In a remarkable letter to Christina of Sweden, Descartes speaks of the point of union between thought and bodily mobility. Almost three hundred years later, Brentano introduced into psychology the concept of *intentionality,* which he in turn drew from Scholasticism's commentaries on Aristotle. But it is with Husserl that the study of intentionality is developed more thoroughly, particularly in his "Ideas Relating to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy." In the best tradition of strict reflection, Husserl calls into question not only the data of the external world but also those of the inner world, opening the way for the independence of *thought* vis-à-vis the materiality of phenomena. Up until that time, thought had been squeezed in a vise—on one side, the absolute idealism of Hegel and, on the other, the natural physical sciences, which were just then undergoing such rapid development. Husserl did not remain long in the study of the hyletic, material data, but produced an eidetic reduction, and from that moment on it was simply impossible to turn back.

With respect to the spatiality of representation in general, it must then be considered a *form* from which the contents cannot be independent. Varying the size of the image, Husserl verified that in any visual image, color cannot be independent of extension. This point is of fundamental importance, because it establishes the form of extension as a condition of all representation. It is from there that we take up this assertion as the theoretical basis for the formulation of the hypothesis of the *space of representation.*

No doubt all of this requires some supporting explanations that at the moment we can deal with only in passing. In the first place, we need to understand *sensation* as the register of the variation in the tone of a sensory organ impacted by a stimulus from our external or internal environment. Moreover, we view *perception* as a *structuring* of sensations carried out by consciousness in relation to one sense or a complex of senses. We all know perfectly well that even in the most elemental sensation a structuring occurs, and recognizing that classical psychology contains at least an approximation of this aspect of our subject we will not need to go too far into the definitions of all these terms. Lastly, I would note that the *image*—which is a structured and formalized re-presentation of sensations or perceptions that are coming or have come from the external or internal environments—precisely because of the immediate structuring effected, cannot be considered a mere passive "copy" of the sensation, as naive psychology would claim.

In contrast, then, to atomistic psychology, we reach the conclusion that sensations, perceptions, and images are all forms of consciousness, and that it would be more correct to speak of a "consciousness of sensation," a "consciousness of perception," and a "consciousness of the image," without necessarily thereby locating ourselves within an apperceptive stance. What I mean by this is that consciousness *modifies* its mode of being, that consciousness is *none other* than a mode of "being"—for example, "expectant," or "moved," and so on. In accordance with the idea of intentionality, it is clear that there is no consciousness without *consciousness of something,* and that this "something" cannot escape the spatiality of representation. And since all representations, considered as acts of consciousness, refer to objects that are represented, and since these two terms form a structure in which the two parts cannot be separated from each other, then representing any object involves the corresponding act of consciousness in the spatiality of representation. Spatialization always occurs in all experience with external representations, whether these have as a base either the five classical senses or the internal senses (originating in coenesthesia or kinesthesia). Moreover, just as the

spatiality of sensation and perception are inextricably linked to “places” on or within the body where the sensory detectors are located, the corresponding re-presentations follow the same path. To represent, for example, a toothache we no longer feel today is to try to “re-create” it at a precise point in one’s mouth, and not, for example, in one’s leg. This is clear and holds true for all representations.

But it is here that one of the most interesting problems arises. The image can become modified to such an extent that it bears little resemblance to the original object, and naive psychology has always treated such “distortion” as a fundamental defect of the image. For that approach, the idea was clear: If an image was a simple copy of a sensation that allows the memory to recall that sensation—that is, if it was only an instrument of what has been called the “faculty of memory”—then any distortion in the image was almost a sin against “nature,” which psychiatrists of the time felt they had to rush in and treat aggressively when some poor unfortunate would go too far in his or her alteration of reality. But joking aside, it is clear that naturalism, and it could not have been any other way, had invaded psychology, just as it had invaded art, politics, and economics. However, it is this very “defect” in the image that allows an image to be distorted, transformed, and finally, as in dreams, translated from one sensory source to be localized in another—and this demonstrates not only the plasticity of this phenomenon but also its extraordinary activity. You can see that to develop these statements more fully would require far more time than we have available today, so let’s continue with our initial idea of outlining the central themes of this investigation. There is, for example, the problem of how the image acts in distinct levels of consciousness, and how it produces various motor abreactions, depending upon how far internally or externally the image is located in the space of representation.

To confirm this, consider an image that, when one is in vigil, makes it possible to extend one’s hand. During sleep, this same image is internalized and no longer moves the hand—except in rare cases of altered sleep or somnambulism in which what occurs is precisely that the image becomes externalized in the space of representation. Even when one is awake, in vigil, a strong emotional shock can displace the images corresponding to fight or flight to a more internal level, sometimes to such a degree that the body is left paralyzed. Conversely, we see how in altered states of consciousness projected images—that is, hallucinations—can mobilize bodily activity, even though they are based on sensory sources that are displaced, translating re-elaborations of the internal world. Thus, depending on the depth and position of the image within the space of representation, various types of bodily activity may be triggered. But we should remember that we are talking about images that are based on different groups of senses—some external, some internal. Coenesthetic images, operating at the appropriate depth and location in the space of representation, provoke abreactions or somatizations in the intrabody, while images that correspond to kinesthesia are what ultimately act on the body from “inside,” setting the body in motion externally.

But in what direction will the body move, given that kinesthesia is a manifestation of internal phenomena? It will move in the direction that has been “traced” by other representations that have the external senses as their sensory basis. If I imagine my arm extended in front of me, I can easily confirm that it does not move simply on account of the visual image, and yet (as has been amply demonstrated in experiments on variations in muscular tonicity) the image does cause my arm to “trace” the direction, although my arm will actually move only when the visual image has been translated into a kinesthetic one.

Let us proceed to those issues related to the nature of the space of representation and to the concepts of *copresence*, *horizon*, and *landscape,* and their role in the system of representation. We have nothing new to add to what has been said in paragraphs three and four of Chapter 3 of “Psychology of the Image,” except what bears upon the final conclusion of this work:

> We have not been speaking of a space of representation *per se* or of a quasi-mental space. Rather, we have said that representation as such cannot be independent of spatiality, though we are not thereby maintaining that representation *occupies* space. It is the form of spatial representation that concerns us here. So it is that when we speak of a “space of representation” rather than simply of representation itself, it is because we are considering the ensemble of perceptions and (non-visual) images that provide the registers (the corporal tone, as well as that of the consciousness) on the basis of which I recognize myself as “me.” That is, I recognize myself as a continuum despite the flow and changes that I experience. So the space of representation is not such because it is an empty container to be filled with phenomena of consciousness, but rather because its nature is representation, and when particular images occur, the consciousness cannot present them other than under the form of extension. Thus, we might also have emphasized the *material* aspect of what is being represented without thereby speaking of its substantiality in the same sense as would physics or chemistry; rather, we would be referring to the *hyletic* data, that is, to the material data and not to materiality itself.
>
> We are left, however, with a difficulty. Of course, no one would think that the consciousness has color or that it is a colored container simply because visual representations are presented as colored. So when we say that the space of representation possesses different levels and depths, is it because we are speaking of a three-dimensional space with volume? Or is it that the perceptual-representational structure of my coenesthesia is presented as having volume? Undoubtedly the latter is the case, and it is thanks to this that my representations may appear above or below, to the left or the right, toward the front or back, and that my “look” may also have a particular perspective toward the image.

For each structure of representation there exist countless alternatives that are not ”unfolded” completely, but rather act *copresently,* accompanying the images that appear “center stage.” Clearly, here we are not referring to “manifest” and “latent” contents, or to the associative paths that can carry the image in one direction or another. Let’s consider an example: When I imagine a certain object proper to my bedroom, even though other objects from that same environment are not present “center-stage,” they accompany that represented object *copresently,* they are part of the same environment as that object. And thanks to that region, in which non-present objects are included, I can, at will, call up before me some or all of those other objects from within the boundaries that demarcate what I call “my bedroom.” In this way, regions are structured among themselves, linked together not simply as groups or ensembles of images but also as expressions, meanings, relationships. I am able to differentiate each region or set of regions from others thanks to “horizons,” what might be called “boundaries” that give me mental orientation and also allow me to move through various mental times and spaces.

When I perceive the external world, when I move in it and my daily life unfolds in it, I am constituting it not only by means of the representations that allow me to recognize and to act in

it but also by *copresent systems of representation.* This structuring of the world that I effect I call ”landscape,” and I know that my perception of the world is always the recognition and the interpretation of a reality that corresponds to my landscape. That world that I take as reality itself is in fact my own biography in action, and that action of transformation that I effect in and upon the world is my own transformation. And when I speak of my inner world, I am also speaking of the interpretation that I make of it and of the transformation I effect on it.

The distinctions we have made so far between “internal” and “external” space are based on the registers of the boundaries set by coenesthetic-tactile perceptions. But they cannot be sustained when we speak of the global nature of consciousness-in-the-world, for which the world is its “landscape” and the self is its “look.” This mode of being in the world on the part of consciousness is basically a mode of action in perspective, whose immediate spatial reference is one’s own body and no longer only the intrabody. But the body, in being an object in the world, is also an object in the landscape and an object of transformation. The body, then, becomes the prosthesis of human intentionality.

If images allow us to recognize and to act, then according to how that landscape is structured in individuals and peoples, according to the needs of those individuals and peoples (or what they consider to be their needs), that is how they will tend to transform the world.

To conclude these comments on “Psychology of the Image,” I will add only that in the configuration of every landscape there are at work, copresently, thetic contents—beliefs or relationships among beliefs—that cannot be rationally maintained and that, accompanying every formulation and every action, constitute the foundation for human life in its continued unfolding.

Therefore, any future theory of action will need to include an understanding of how it is possible that, from its most elementary expression, human activity is not a simple reflection of conditions, and how it is that this activity, in transforming the world, transforms the producer of the action as well. From the point of view of a future ethic as well as the perspective of the possibilities for human progress, the conclusions reached will have import, as will the direction chosen on the basis of these conclusions. Let us now move on to comment briefly on the second essay.

The second essay, “Historiological Discussions,” is an attempt to study the prerequisites needed for a proper foundation of what we call “historiology.” The discussion begins by questioning whether or not the terms “historiography” and “philosophy of history” can continue to be useful for much longer, considering that they have been used in such diverse ways that it is now difficult even to determine just what they refer to. The term ”historiology” was coined by José Ortega y Gasset in about 1928 in an essay titled “Hegel’s Philosophy of History and Historiology.” In a note to my essay, I quote Ortega, who says the following:

> Against this state of affairs in the realm of History, there raises up historiology. It is moved by the conviction that History, like empirical science, above all has to be construction and not a ‘gluey mass’—to use the words that Hegel hurls again and again at the historians of his time. The case that the historians could have against Hegel, by opposing [the idea] that the body of history should be constructed directly by philosophy, does not justify the tendency, even more marked in that century, of being content with a sticking together of data. With a hundredth part of what for some time has already been gathered and polished, it was enough to work out some kind of scientific conduct much more authentic and substantial than so much, in effect, that History books offer us.

In the present essay, then, continuing that debate begun so long ago, I speak of *historiology* in the sense of the interpretation and construction of a coherent theory in which historical data *per se* cannot simply be juxtaposed or treated as a simple chronology of events, except at the risk of emptying the historical event of all meaning. The pretension of a History (with a capital H) free of all interpretation is nonsense, and has invalidated many historiographical efforts in the past.

The second essay of *Contributions to Thought* studies the vision of historical fact that has been employed from Herodotus on, a vision that begins with the historian's landscape being introduced into the description of historical "fact." In this way, at least four distortions become apparent in the usual historical optic. In the first place, there can be the intentional introduction of the time in which the historian is living, in order to emphasize or minimize facts in accordance with this perspective. This defect can be observed in the presentation of the historical account, and it affects the transmission of the facts as much as the myth, legend, religion, or literature that has served as its source. The second error involves the manipulation of sources, and such imposture merits no further comment. The third error is the simplification and stereotyping that allows facts to be elevated or discredited, in order to make them conform to some more or less generally accepted model. The economy of effort for both the producers and readers of works of this nature is such that they often draw a large readership, though their scientific validity is questionable at best. In these works, stories, rumors, or secondhand information are often substituted for verifiable information. The fourth form of distortion is the "censorship" that at times lies not only in the pen of the historian but in the mind of the reader. Such censorship prevents new points of view from being accurately disseminated, because the historical moment itself, with its whole repertoire of beliefs, forms such a powerful barrier. The free circulation of new views and perspectives thus arises only with the passing of time, or perhaps the eruption of dramatic events that discredit widely held beliefs, clearing the way for a candid reassessment.

This discussion thus examines the general difficulties that exist for the evaluation of events in the "mediate past." But our disquiet grows as we see that even in the telling of the most immediate history—a subject's own autobiography—the person will tell third parties and even him or herself of events that never took place or are clearly distorted—and all this, in turn, within an inescapable system of interpretation. If that is the case, what will not happen with events that have not been lived by the historian and form part of what we call "mediate history"? At any rate, we note that none of this necessarily leads us to a skepticism with regard to History itself, thanks to our recognition of the need for Historiology to be constructive and, of course, to meet certain other conditions if it is to be considered an exact science.

"Historiological Discussions" continues, but now with what we call "conceptions of history without temporal foundation." This is from the first paragraph of Chapter 2: "In the numerous systems in which some rudiments of historiology appear, all the effort seems to be focused on justifying the dateability, the accepted calendar time, of facts, analyzing how they occurred, why they occurred, or how things must have occurred—without considering what this 'occurring' is, how it is possible in general that something occurs." All those who have undertaken to construct true cathedrals of the Philosophy of History, insofar as they have not answered the fundamental question on the nature of *occurrence*, have presented us with a history of the accepted dateability of things, but without the dimension of temporality that is necessary in order for that to be apprehended. In general terms, we observe that the concept of time that has prevailed is one that corresponds to naive perception, in which facts or events "unfold" without structurality, in simple succession from one, earlier phenomenon to the next, in a linear sequence of

occurrences following “one after another,” without our understanding how it is that one moment turns into, becomes another—without our grasping, that is, the inner transformation of events. Because to say that an event occurs from moment A to moment B and so on to moment *n;* from a past, moving through a present and projecting into a future, speaks to us only of the location of the observer in a time of conventional dateability, emphasizing the historian’s perception of time—and, as the perception that it is, spatializes it toward a “back then” and an “up ahead” in just the way that the hands of a clock spatialize time to show its passing.

Understanding this concept presents no great difficulties, once we recognize that all perceptions and representations occur in the form of “space” (see “Psychology of the Image”). Now, why must time flow from a back-there toward an up-ahead, and not, for example, the other way around, or in unpredictable jumps and leaps? And one can’t answer with a simple “because that’s the way things are!” If each “now” is “at each end” an indeterminate succession of instants, then one comes to the conclusion that time is infinite. When we accept that purported “reality,” we remove our *look* from the finitude of the person who is looking, and we pass through life with the sense that “doing” among things is infinite, although copresently we know that life has an end. Thus, the “things we have to do” escape death at every moment; that is why one “has” more or less time for certain things, because “have” refers to “things,” and then as we pass through life, the flow of life itself becomes a thing, is naturalized.

The naturalistic conception of time to which Historiography and the Philosophy of History have been subject until today lies in the belief in the *passivity* of the human being in the construction of historical time, and with that we have come to consider human history as a “reflection,” an epiphenomenon, or a simple mechanism for the transmission of natural events. And when, in an apparent leap from the natural to the social, people have spoken of humanity as the producer of historical fact, they have continued to rely on that naturalism within which society has been “spatialized” in a naive vision of time.

A strict reflective thought leads us to understand that, in every human activity, moments in time do not follow one after another “naturally,” but that past, present, and future instants act constructively, “that which occurred” as (past) memory or knowledge is as determining as the (future) “projects” one attempts to achieve through (present) action. The fact that the human being does not possess a “nature” in the way that an object does, the fact that intention tends to overcome any natural determinants, demonstrates the human being’s radical historicity. The human being constitutes itself and constructs itself in its action-in-the-world, and in that way gives meaning to its journey through life and to the absurdity of non-intentional nature. Finitude, in terms of time and space, is present as the first absurd, meaningless condition that, with clear registers of pain and suffering, nature imposes on human life. The struggle against that absurdity, the overcoming of that pain and suffering, is what gives meaning to the long process of history.

We will not continue here with the interesting questions of the extended and difficult debate on the problem of temporality, the issue of the human body and its transformation, and the natural world as the growing prosthesis of society, because I would like to stop here to list the principal problems and questions that are maintained as hypotheses in this essay.

In the first place, this essay examines the social and historical constitution of human life, seeking the inner temporality of its transformation, something far removed from a succession of linear, “one after the other” events. It then goes on to observe the coexistence on a single, historical stage of generations that have been born at different times and whose landscapes of formation, whose education, and whose projects are not homogeneous. The generational

dialectic—that is, the struggle for control of the central social space—is seen to take place between temporal accumulations in which either the past, present, or future are primary, and in which those accumulations are represented by generations of different ages. The landscapes of each generation, in turn, along with the different substrata of beliefs that each of them holds, dynamize their action toward the world. But just because the birth and death of generations is a biological fact, that does not allow us to biologize their dialectic. Thus, the naive conception of "generations"—according to which "the young are revolutionaries, the middle-aged are conservatives, and the old are reactionaries"—finds strong refutation in numerous historical analyses, which if not taken into account will only lead us to a new, naturalistic myth whose correlate is a glorification of youth. What defines the sign of the generational dialectic at every historical moment is the project for transformation or conservation that each generation launches toward the future. Of course, there are more than three generations that coexist on the same stage of history at any given moment, but the leading roles are played by those we have mentioned, that is, those contiguous to the center, not those that are "copresent"—children and old people. But since the entire structure at any given moment of history is in transformation, its sign is constantly changing, as children enter youth and those in middle age move into old age. This historical continuum shows us temporality in action, and makes us understand human beings as protagonists in their own history.

And so, with greater understanding of the functioning of temporality, we find in these "Historiological Discussions" elements that, along with those concerning the space of representation in "Psychology of the Image," will perhaps allow us to form the foundation of a complete theory of human action.

Thank you.

Universal Root Myths

(*Mitos Raíces Universales*)

San Martín Cultural Center, Buenos Aires, April 18, 1991

Before beginning my comments on *Universal Root Myths,* I would like to explain what led me to write this book and how it is related to my previous works. First, the reasons for writing it:

With an intention more like that of the student of social psychology than the student of comparative religion, ethnology, or anthropology, I have delved into to the myths of many cultures. I have asked myself, Why not review the most ancient systems of ideation so that, since we are not directly immersed in them, we might as a result of that fresh perspective learn something new about ourselves? Why not penetrate into a world of beliefs that, while it is foreign to us, surely accompanied others' attitudes toward life? Why not stretch ourselves in this way so that we might understand, thanks to these reference points, why it is that our fundamental beliefs are tottering today? These are the concerns that have motivated my survey of the mythic productions of these cultures. It is true that I might have followed the thread presented by the history of institutions, or ideas, or art, in order to try to arrive at the base of beliefs that have operated in these different times and places, but I would almost certainly not have obtained phenomena as pure and direct as those presented by mythology.

My initial plan for the book was to set down the myths of various peoples of the world, accompanying them with brief comments or notes in such a way that this would form neither an interference nor an interpretation. As I began, however, I encountered a number of difficulties. In the first place, I would have to limit the scope of this survey, since I proposed to use texts accepted as historically accurate, discarding those that were compilations of more ancient material or were commentaries on the material itself, and would thus present a number of drawbacks. I found that I could not overcome this problem, even by limiting myself to using the source texts on the basis of which the information of the past has come down to us. Nor could I go to the oral tradition that contemporary researchers have rescued from isolated collectivities.

It was the recognition of certain methodological complications that decided me in this. Let me give an example of these by citing Mircea Eliade from his work *Aspects du mythe:*

> In comparison with the myths that narrate the end of the world *in the past,* myths that refer to a *future* end are paradoxically few among primitive peoples. As Lehmann points out, this rarity is due perhaps to the fact that ethnologists have not asked these questions in their surveys. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether the myth concerns a catastrophe in the past or future. According to the testimony of E. H. Man, the Andamans believe that after the end of the world a new humanity will make its appearance, and will live in a paradisal state; there will be neither illness nor old age nor death. The dead will be born again after the catastrophe. But according to R. Brown, Man probably combined several versions, gathered from different informants. In fact, says Brown, this is a myth that tells of the end and re-creation of the world; but the myth refers to the past, not the future. Since, according to Lehmann's own observations, the Andaman language has no future tense, it is hard to decide whether this is a past or future event.

In Eliade's observations there appear at least three points of disagreement among researchers in regard to a given myth, which are that: (1) there is a possibility that surveys of these groups of subjects have been poorly formulated or phrased; (2) the sources of information are not homogeneous; and (3) the language in which the information was originally conveyed does not have the tense necessary for us to understand it, especially when what is in question is a temporal myth.

Stumbling blocks of this sort, to which many others might be added, have prevented me from taking advantage of much of the enormous wealth of information provided by researchers in the field. Thus, I have been unable to include the myths of black Africa, Oceania, Polynesia, or even South America in this study.

When I examined the most ancient texts, I found great disparities in the range of documents. For example, the Sumero-Acadian culture left one great poem, *Gilgamesh,* almost complete, with the remaining fragments in no way reaching the same level. On the other hand, the culture of India almost overwhelms us with its vast body of works. To achieve at least a minimum of balance I decided to take from Indian literature a number of brief samples that would be representative of the whole. Thus, taking the Sumero-Acadian and Assyrio-Babylonian cultures as examples, I reduced the overabundance provided by the other cultures, finally setting before the reader's eyes the myths—in my judgment the most significant myths—of ten different cultures.

Having said all this, and while I must acknowledge that this procedure has resulted in a work that is rather incomplete, it is nevertheless a work that in its essentials manages to underscore a key point in the system of historical beliefs. I am referring to what I call the "root myth," which I understand as the *nucleus of mythic ideation,* which—despite any deformation and transformation of the stage upon which its action unfolds, despite variations in the names of the characters and in their secondary attributes—may pass from nation to nation with its central argument preserved more or less intact, thus becoming universal. Moreover, the double character of certain myths, in which they are both "root" and "universal," has allowed me to focus my subject by selecting myths that fulfill both of these conditions. This does not, of course, mean that I do not recognize the existence of other mythic nuclei that are not presented in this summary anthology.

With this, I believe I have answered the question regarding the reasons that led me to write this book, and I've also tried to give some idea of the difficulties I encountered as I attempted to achieve the objectives I originally set for myself.

But there are still a few points to make clear. I refer to the second question that I put forth at the beginning regarding the relationship between this work and my previous works.

No doubt many of you have read *The Inner Look* and possibly *The Internal Landscape* and *The Human Landscape.* You may remember that those three little books, written at different times, were gathered together under the title *Humanize the Earth.* Through the poetic prose of those works, I was able to shift the point of view from one that is oneiric and personal, charged with symbols and allegories, to one that opens outward to the interpersonal, to the social and historical. The conception underlying that work has been further developed in other works that have followed it, though with varying treatments and styles. For instance, in *Guided Experiences,* a series of short tales, I framed or "staged" a variety of scenes that enable the reader to imagine a range of problems from daily life. From the beginning of each story in an "entrance," which is sometimes more realistic and sometimes more unreal, readers are able to move through scenes in which they can, allegorically, come face to face with problems and

issues from their own lives. These are presented as literary “knots” or conflicts, which raise the general tension of the scene, followed by a dénouement, and finally an “exit” from the story in a “happy ending.”

The central ideas on which these guided experiences are based are these:

1. Just as in dreams there appear images that are the allegorized expression of deep tensions, in daily life there occur similar phenomena, though we do not pay them much attention—these are the daydreams and mental meanderings that, converted into images, carry psychic charges that perform very important functions in our lives.
2. Images are what allow one to move one’s body in one direction or another. But images are not only visual—there are images that correspond to each external sense, and they are what allow the consciousness to open outward into the world, mobilizing the body. Of course, since we also have *internal* senses, there are, correspondingly, images whose energy discharges toward the interior, and that in so doing decrease or increase tensions in the intrabody.
3. One’s entire biography—that is, one’s memory—also acts through images that are associated with the various tensions and affective climates with which they were “recorded.”
4. That biography is constantly acting in every one of us, and therefore we do not *passively* capture the world that is presented to us in each new perception, but rather our biographical images act as a previously constituted “landscape” for that perception. So it is that every day we carry out various activities during which we “cover” the world with our daydreams, compulsions, and deepest aspirations.
5. One’s action or inhibition vis-à-vis the world is closely tied to the theme of the image, so that transformations of the image are also important keys to behavioral variation; since it is clearly possible to transform images and transfer their charges, one must therefore infer that changes in behavior do occur in these cases.
6. In dreams and daydreams, in artistic production, and in myths, images appear that correspond to vital tensions and to those “biographies,” whether of the individual or of whole peoples; such images orient behavior (likewise individual or collective, as the case may be).

These six ideas form the foundation of the stories in *Guided Experiences.* In the notes that accompany the text readers will also find material from ancient legends, stories, and myths, although in that work they are applied to the individual reader or those who may read these writings aloud in small groups.

Turning now to my most recent work, *Contributions to Thought,* no one can fail to notice that the style of this book is that of the philosophical essay. The two sections of the book examine, first, “Psychology of the Image” in a quasi-theory of consciousness and, second, the subject of History. While the objects of investigation in these two cases are, it is true, quite different, the themes of “landscape” and the “prepredicates” of an era—that is, its underlying beliefs—are common points in both sections.

As can be seen, *Universal Root Myths* bears a close relationship to these previous works, although it focuses on *collective* rather than individual or personal images, and takes a new turn in its mode of expression. On this latter point, I would add that I do not believe that systematic production with uniformity in style is what is called for in the times we live in. On the contrary, our age demands diversity in order for new ideas to fulfill their destiny.

Universal Root Myths is based on the same ideas as my other works, and I believe that any new book of mine will maintain that ideological continuity, even though it may deal with different subject matter and may vary in its style and genre. Having explained, at least synthetically, my

reasons for writing this book, and the relationship it bears to my previous works, let's move on to the root myths themselves.

The word "myth" has been used over time in many different ways. Two and a half millennia ago, Xenophanes began to use the word to reject those statements by Homer and Hesiod that did not refer to proven or acceptable truths. Later, *mythos* gradually came to be contrasted with *logos* and *historia,* both of which indicated that the events they told of or the stories they narrated had actually taken place. Little by little myth became desacralized, and the word began to mean more or less the same as *fable* or *fiction,* even when the stories being told dealt with gods that people still believed in. The Greeks were also the first to try to understand myths in a systematic way. Some used a sort of allegorical interpretive method and sought the truths that underlay the mythic surface. Thus, they came to view these fantastic productions as rudimentary explanations of physical laws or natural phenomena. But by the time of Alexandrian Gnosticism and during the period of patristic Christianity there was also an attempt to understand myths as yet another type of allegorization—explanations not so much of natural phenomena as of phenomena of the soul, or what today would be called the psyche. A second interpretive method tried to find in myths the history that preceded the dawn of civilization. Thus, the gods were but vague memories of ancient heroes, elevated from their mortal state. In the same way, this method viewed mythic events as having originated in much more modest historical events, which were later raised to a heroic level.

These two interpretive paths that were used to try to explain and understand myth (and there were, of course, other methods as well) have continued down to our own day. In both cases, there is an underlying idea of the "distortion" of events and of the delight or enchantment that such distortion produces in the naive mind. It is true that myths were used by the great Greek tragedians and that to some extent the theater derived its productions from mythic events, but in this case the spectator's enchantment was aesthetic—the spectator was moved by artistic grace, not because he or she believed in those representations. It was in Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and the Neo-Platonic schools that myth took on a new meaning, in which it was attributed the power to transform the spirit of the person who came in contact with it. Thus, in performing mythic scenes, the Orphics sought to achieve a "catharsis," an inner cleansing that would later allow them to ascend to a greater understanding in the order of emotions and ideas. As can be seen, all of these interpretations have come down to us today and form part of the unexamined ideas espoused by both the public in general and specialists in the field. We should note, however, that for a long period in the West, Greek myth lay hidden, and indeed did not begin to reemerge until the time of the Humanists in the Renaissance and subsequently in the age of the European revolutions. An admiration for the classics made scholars turn once more to the Hellenic sources. The arts, too, were touched by this influence, and in this way Greek mythology has continued to act.

Transforming itself once again, mythology has become fused into the very foundations of the new disciplines that study human behavior. Though subject to the attraction of Romantic irrationalism, Depth Psychology, born in Austria during the decline of Neoclassicism, stands as a particular offshoot of those ancient currents of thought. It is not surprising, then, that the motifs of Oedipus, Elektra, and so on, have been taken from the Greek tragedians and used in explanations of the functioning of the mind, or that cathartic techniques of dramatic re-creation along the lines of Orphic ideas and practices have been applied in various therapies.

I should note that traditionally, myth has been differentiated from legend, saga, story, and fable. In *legend,* history is deformed by tradition; epic literature is rich in examples of this type.

With respect to *story,* authors such as de Vries consider that story is distinct from legend, which incorporates folkloric elements with which it colors or modifies the tale. *Saga,* in turn, is similar to story but almost always ends tragically, whereas a story often has a happy ending. At any rate, desacralized mythic elements are often introduced into both the pessimistic saga and the optimistic story. A very different genre is the *fable,* which hides a moral lesson beneath the mask of fiction.

These elementary distinctions serve our purposes in that they mark the differences between these latter genres and myth as we have been defining it—that is, characterized by the presence of the gods and the actions of the gods, though their actions may be carried out by men, heroes, or demigods. Thus, when we speak of myths we are also referring to an ambit touched by a divine presence that is believed in and that pervades all its constituent elements. It is a very different thing to refer to those same gods but in a desacralized ambit, in which belief has, for example, become converted into a kind of aesthetic enjoyment. This marks a great difference between the presentation of the mythologies currently in vogue (which describe ancient beliefs in an externalized and formal way), and a mythic expression that is treated as sacred from "within" the atmosphere in which the myth was created.

Continuing with the question of what differentiates the present approach, I should explain that I have not attempted to address the living religions that surely accompanied the myth, nor have I dealt with the ritualistic or ceremonial aspects. I have also not included any treatment of Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, but have limited myself to presenting some profound myths of Judaism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism in order to gain an understanding of the powerful influence their images have had on those first three. In this way, the idea of the root, universal myth shared by all peoples of the world has, I believe, been done full justice.

In contemporary times and in common language, however, the word "myth" denotes two quite distinct things. On the one hand, it refers to fantastic tales of the deities of various cultures; on the other, it refers to things in which people believe very strongly but that are in fact false. Clearly, these two meanings have in common the idea that certain beliefs have a strong hold over people and that any rational argument against them finds hard going. Thus, we find it surprising that clear-headed philosophers and thinkers of antiquity could believe in things that today our children listen to as simple bedtime stories. Encountering beliefs in a flat earth or geocentrism brings a tolerant smile to our lips, for we realize that such theories were nothing but explanatory myths for a reality about which scientific thought had yet to formulate definitive answers. And so, when we look today at some of the things that we believed in just a few years ago, we can only blush at our own naiveté—while in the meantime we continue to be drawn in by new myths, without realizing that the same phenomenon is happening to us all over again.

In these times of vertiginous transformations of the world, we have witnessed beliefs that are held as unquestionable truths about the individual and society emerge and disappear over the course of just a few short years. I say "beliefs" instead of "theories" or "doctrines" because I want to underscore the nucleus of prepredicates, those perhaps unseen prejudices that operate prior to the formulation of more or less scientific schemata. Just as technological innovations are greeted with exclamations like "Fabulous!" or "Incredible!"—the equivalent of oral applause—we often hear the same "Incredible" also applied to today's political changes, the sudden collapse of entire ideologies, the conduct of leaders and opinion-makers, the behavior of societies. But this second "Incredible" is not exactly the same as the emotional state that is manifested in the face of technological wonders; rather, it reflects surprise and disquiet at phenomena that were

not believed possible. Simply put, many of our contemporaries believed that things were different and that the future was leading in another direction.

We should, therefore, recognize that there has been a great exposure to myths, and that this has had consequences in our attitudes toward life, in the way that we face existence. I should note that I do not take myths to be absolute falsehoods but, on the contrary, as psychological truths that may or may not coincide with the perception of this world that we find ourselves in. And there is something else: Those beliefs are not just passive schemata or ideas, but correspond to tensions and emotional climates that, taking shape in images, become forces that orient and direct action, both individual and collective. Independent of the ethical or exemplary character they sometimes have, certain beliefs by their very nature possess great referential force. We are aware that beliefs regarding the gods are quite different from strong beliefs of a secular nature; however, even taking those differences into account, we note structures that are common to both.

The weak beliefs with which we move through daily life easily change as soon as we notice that our perception of things was mistaken. On the other hand, when we speak of strongly held beliefs—those beliefs upon which we mount our overall, global interpretation of the world, our most general likes and dislikes, our irrational scale of values—then we are touching the structure of myths that we are not even willing to question deeply because we are so totally committed to it. Moreover, when one of these myths collapses, we are plunged into a profound crisis in which we feel like leaves tossed about by the wind. These myths, private or collective, orient our behavior, though we are generally aware of their profound action only through certain images that guide us in a particular direction.

Every period in history has its own powerful underlying beliefs, its own collective mythic structure, whether sacralized or not. These beliefs facilitate the cohesion of human groups, giving them identity and allowing their participation in a common ambit. Questioning the basic myths of an age opens one up to an irrational reaction whose intensity will vary depending on the force of the critique and how deeply rooted are the beliefs in question. But, of course, one generation follows upon another and the historical moment changes; thus, a belief that was repellent in an earlier time begins to be accepted with a naturalness that makes it seem the most obvious truth.

Today, for instance, if we begin to question the central myth of money, we will most probably elicit a reaction unfavorable to any sort of dialogue. Our interlocutor will rush to the defense, exclaiming, for example, “What do you mean, money is a myth? You have to have money to live!” Or perhaps, “A myth is something that’s false, something you can’t see or touch. But money is a tangible reality—money makes the world go round.” And so on. There is no use in our pointing out the difference between the tangible nature of money and the intangible things that we believe having money can bring us. There is no use our noting the great difference between money as a sign representing the value attributed to things, and the psychological charge that that sign possesses. We will already have become suspect. Immediately our interlocutor will begin to look us coldly up and down, exorcising the heresy as he calculates the price of our clothes—which have, indisputably, cost money. He will reflect on our weight and our daily caloric intake, consider the neighborhood we live in, and so on.

At that moment we might soften our position by saying something like, “But, of course, we have to distinguish between the money that one needs to live and *unnecessary* money…” But that concession comes too late. After all, there are so many banks, credit institutions, money in such a range of different forms—that is, so many “realities” all attesting to an efficacy that we

appear to deny. Yet in this picturesque fiction we have not denied the instrumental efficacy of money—in fact, we have endowed it with a tremendous psychological power, for we have seen that the object “money” is attributed greater magic than it actually has: This tangible thing will bring us intangible happiness and in some way immortality, for it can distract us from our concern with the problem of death.

This secular myth is often found operating not too far from the gods. We all know, for instance, that the word “money” derives from Juno Moneta—Juno “who gives warning,” at whose temple the Romans minted the coins of their realm. People prayed to Juno Moneta for abundance, for wealth—but for those who believed in her, Juno herself was more important than the money that came from her benevolence. True believers today pray to their gods for different things, among which is money; but if they truly believe in their deity, the deity itself remains at the apex of their scale of values.

Money, as a fetish, has undergone great transformations. At least in the West, for a long time money was backed by gold, that mysterious, rare metal whose special qualities have made it so attractive. Medieval alchemists set out to produce it artificially. To gold, still sacred, was attributed the power to multiply itself without limits, to serve as a universal elixir, and to confer long life as well as wealth. Gold thus inspired zealous quests throughout the Americas. But I am referring not only to the so-called “gold fever” that drove adventurers and colonists in the United States, I am also speaking of that El Dorado sought by the conquistadors and associated with minor myths such as the Fountain of Youth.

A deeply rooted myth will pull a whole constellation of minor myths into orbit around it, like a sun. Thus, in our example of money, there are numerous objects that become charged with an aura transferred from the central nucleus. The automobile, which is so useful to us, is also a symbol of money, and may symbolize a status that opens the door to still more money. On this point, Andrew Greeley has the following to say:

> All it takes is a visit to the annual car show to recognize a profoundly ritualized religious manifestation. The colors, the lights, the music, the reverence of the worshippers, the presence of the priestesses of the temple (the models), the pomp and luxury, the prodigality of money, the compact mass (in another civilization all this would constitute an authentically liturgical rite). The cult of the sacred automobile has its faithful and its initiates. The Gnostic did not await with any more impatience the revelation of the oracle than the car-worshiper awaits the first rumors of the new models. It is in that moment of the annual periodic cycle that the priests of the cult (the car salesmen) take on new importance, at the same time as an anxious multitude impatiently awaits the advent of a new form of salvation.

While I may not fully agree with the dimensions that this author ascribes to the worship of the fetish automobile, what is interesting is that he has allowed us to see the mythic aspect of a contemporary object. This is, of course, a secular myth, but perhaps we can see in it a structure similar to that of sacred myth, though without its fundamental characteristic of autonomous, conscious, independent force. If the author were to consider rites of annual periodicity, for example, the same description he has given could also be applied to birthday and New Year’s celebrations, the Oscar ceremonies, and other such secular rites, though clearly these rituals tend not to take place in the religious atmosphere proper to sacred myths. It would also be interesting to examine the differences between “myth” and “ceremony,” though that is beyond the scope of the present study. And it would be interesting to examine the differences between

the universes of mythic beings entreated by prayers and those of magical forces manipulated by rites of enchantment, but that is also beyond the scope of the present study.

When we examined money as one of the central secular myths of our time, we described it as the nucleus or gravitational center of a whole system of ideation. I suppose that my listeners will probably not have imagined in this context a figure such as the atomic model of Niels Bohr, in which the nucleus is the central mass around which the electrons revolve. But in fact the nucleus of a system of ideation colors with its own particular characteristics a great part of people's lives—their behavior, their ambitions and desires, their fears, are all related to this theme. And there is even more to this: An entire interpretation of the world and the events of that world is connected to this nucleus. In our example, the history of humanity would then take on an *economic* character, and this history will culminate in paradise when conflicts that question the supremacy of money finally cease.

We have taken as our reference one of the central secular myths of our time, in order to illustrate the possible functioning in their own times of the sacred myths presented in this book. There is, however, an enormous distance between these mythic systems, because the numinous, the divine, is completely absent in one of them, and that produces differences that are difficult to ignore. In any case, in today's world things are changing at a tremendous rate, and I believe we can see that one historical moment has closed and another one is opening. We are at a moment in which a new scale of values and a new sensibility seem to be emerging. Nevertheless, I cannot assure you that the gods are once again approaching humankind. Much as Buber experienced it, contemporary theologians feel anguish over the absence of God, an anguish that Nietzsche was unable to overcome following the death of God. It could be that in the ancient myths there was too much of a personal anthropomorphism, and perhaps that which we call "God" expresses itself voicelessly through the Destiny of humanity.

If I should be asked whether I expect the emergence of new myths, I would say that that is precisely what is taking place today. I only hope that those tremendous forces unleashed by History might come to generate a planetary and truly human civilization in which inequality and intolerance are forever abolished. Then, as an old book says, "swords shall be beaten into plowshares."

Thank you.

Philosophy and Literary Works

Grand Palace, Santiago, Chile, May 23, 1991

I wish to thank Planeta Publishers and the many friends who have invited me to speak today about some of my recently published writings. And, of course, I want to thank all of you who are present today.

In lectures given in a number of countries I have spoken separately about each of these books as they have been published. Today, on the other hand, I will try to give an overview of the ideas that form the basis of all of these works. However, since the four volumes of which we are speaking are not uniform in style or subject matter, it will be necessary to mention some of their specific characteristics. As we will see, the interests that gave rise to these works are diverse and the forms of expression vary—from the poetic prose of *Humanize the Earth,* to the short stories of *Guided Experiences,* to the exegesis of *Universal Root Myths,* and to the essays of *Contributions to Thought.*

Touching briefly on each of these works, let me note that the first, *Humanize the Earth,* is a triptych comprised of three works that were written in 1972, 1981, and 1988. These works circulated separately under the titles *The Inner Look, The Internal Landscape,* and *The Human Landscape. Humanize the Earth* is, then, comprised of these three works, and each work is in turn divided into chapters and the chapters into numbered paragraphs. In general, the discourse is meant to serve as an appeal, hence the imperative sentences that give the text a certain hardness. To discharge the resulting tension, however, there are frequent declarative sentences, which allow readers to compare what is being said against their own experience.

This slightly polemical work can present the reader with some difficulties owing to the deliberately forced quality of the Spanish in which it was written. This quality produces an atmosphere that, while it is in keeping with the emotions I have wanted to communicate, can result in problems in grasping the meaning, and therefore a full understanding, as became apparent when this work began to be translated into other languages. *Humanize the Earth,* then, is a work that presents in poetic prose ideas dealing with human life in its most general aspects. It makes use of a dynamic point of view, which begins in the interior of the person and opens toward the social and interpersonal; it makes an appeal to readers, urging them to overcome the non-meaning of life, proposing activity and militancy supporting the humanization of the world.

The second book, titled *Guided Experiences,* was originally written in 1980. As observed in the prefatory note, this is a collection of short stories written in the first person; however, it should be clarified that that “first person” is not the author, as is so often the case, but in fact the reader. This effect is achieved by making the setting of each story a frame for readers to fill with themselves and their own contents. To assist the text, asterisks are placed at certain points; these asterisks indicate pauses that assist the reader in mentally introducing images from his or her own life, in this way turning the passive reader-observer into an actor in and co-author of each description. In literary works, plays, films, and television programs, the reader or spectator can identify more or less completely with the characters, but always recognizes, either at the

time or later, the differences between the actor who appears “in” the scene and the observer who is located “outside” it, and who is none other than the reader or spectator him or herself.

In these guided experiences, quite the opposite occurs: The main character is the reader-observer, who is at once both agent and recipient of the actions and emotions in the story. In addition, the notes to the book provide elements sufficient to enable any person with a minimum of literary ability to construct new tales that can form the basis of aesthetic pleasure or, alternatively, parameters for reflection on situations in the reader’s life that demand some change in behavior or an immediate response that the reader may need to clarify. In contrast to *Humanize the Earth,* which dealt in poetic prose with the *general* situations of one’s life, encouraging and exhorting people in similarly general ways, the *Guided Experiences* employ the technique of the short story to help the reader give order to and orient the actions he or she may decide to take in *particular* situations of daily life.

The third volume, *Universal Root Myths,* was written in 1990. Unlike *Guided Experiences,* which focuses on images that correspond to individual life, this work compares and comments upon those ancient *collective images* that cultures have fashioned into myths. It is a work of exegesis, of interpretation of texts from other times and places. *Universal Root Myths* attempts to focus on, or isolate, those myths whose central plots have shown a certain permanence in time, even though the names and secondary attributes of the protagonists have changed. These myths, which I call “root myths,” also have a “universal” character, not simply because of their geographical range but also because of how they have been adopted by other peoples. Considering the double function that we attribute to the *image* in New Humanism—as a translation of vital tensions and also as giving impulse to behavior tending to discharge those tensions—the collective image fashioned into myth allows us to approach an understanding of the psychosocial basis of that image-myth. In this way, *Universal Root Myths* leads us toward an understanding of the factors that bring about cohesion in and give orientation to human groups, whether the myths in question embody religious truths or powerful social beliefs of a secular nature.

Two essays, “Psychology of the Image” (1988) and “Historiological Discussions” (1989), together make up a fourth volume titled *Contributions to Thought.* This book presents, in a very succinct way, what are for us the most important theoretical issues regarding the *structure of human life* and the *historicity* in which that structure unfolds.

The comments made so far should now make it possible to try to present an overall picture of the ideas that form the foundation of these various works, but I should note once again that it is in *Contributions to Thought* that some of these ideas are presented with the greatest precision.

Let us begin with some considerations regarding ideologies and systems of thought. The thinking that underlies these works does not begin by positing generalities but rather by studying the particulars of human life—the particulars of existence, the particulars of the personal register of thinking, feeling, and acting. This starting point makes our thinking incompatible with any system that begins from such things as Idea, or Matter, or the Unconscious, or the Will. This is so because any truth that claims to speak about humankind, society, history, and so on, must first begin with questions relating to the subject who is issuing those statements; otherwise, in speaking about humankind, we forget the one who is speaking, we replace or postpone dealing with that person—as though we wanted to leave the human being aside because its profundities make us uneasy, because its daily weaknesses and eventual death throw us into the arms of the Absurd. In that sense, the various theories about the human being have perhaps served to

lull us, to distract our gaze from that *concrete human being* who suffers, enjoys, creates, and fails; that being who surrounds us and who we in fact are; that child who from birth will tend to be objectified; that aged person whose youthful hopes have been dashed. We learn nothing from any ideology that presents itself as reality itself or pretends *not* to be an ideology, attempting to supplant the truth that exposes it as just one more human construction.

The fact that the human being may or may not find God, may or may not gain in knowledge and mastery of nature, may or may not achieve a social organization in keeping with human dignity, always places one term of the equation in each person's own register. And whether a person accepts or rejects a particular conception, however logical or outlandish that conception may be, it will always be the *person* who is accepting or rejecting, the person who is present, at issue, integrally involved. Let us speak, then, of *human life.*

When I observe myself, not from a physiological point of view but from an existential one, I find myself immersed in a world that is *given*, a world neither constructed nor chosen by me. I find myself *in situation* with phenomena that, beginning with my own body, are inevitable. The body as fundamental constituent of my existence is also a phenomenon that is homogeneous with the natural world in which it acts and that also acts upon it. But the natural character of the body has important differences for me from all other phenomena in that: (1) I have an immediate register of my body; (2) my register of external phenomena is mediated by my body; and (3) some of my body's operations are accessible to my immediate intention.

It happens, however, that the world presents itself to me not simply as a conglomerate of natural objects, but also as something articulated by other human beings, along with the objects and signs produced or modified by them. The intention I observe in myself is a fundamental element for the interpretation of the behavior of others, and just as I constitute the social world by an understanding of intentions, so am I constituted by it. Of course, we are talking about intentions that are manifested in some bodily action. It is through the corporal expressions or through perceiving the situation in which I encounter another that I am able to understand the meanings, the intentions, of the other. Furthermore, natural and human objects appear to me as linked to pleasure or pain, and I try to modify my situation in order to situate myself favorably with respect to them. In this way, I am not closed off from the world of natural things and other human beings, but rather what most characterizes me is precisely *opening.* My consciousness has been configured *intersubjectively:* It employs codes of reasoning, emotional models, patterns of action that I register as "mine" but that I also recognize in others. And, of course, my body is open to the world in that I both perceive it and act upon it.

The natural world, however, unlike the human world, appears to me as devoid of intention. Of course, I can imagine that the rocks, plants, and stars possess intention, but I find no way to achieve an effective dialogue with them. Even animals, in which at times I glimpse the spark of intelligence, appear to me as impenetrable and only changing slowly from within their own natures. I see insect societies that are rigidly structured, higher mammals that employ rudimentary technologies, but still only replicate such codes in a slow process of genetic modification, as though each animal born was always the first representative of its respective species. And when I see the benefits derived from those plants and animals that have been modified and domesticated by humanity, I see human intention opening its way and humanizing the world.

To define the human being in terms of sociability also seems inadequate, because this does not distinguish human beings from many other species. Nor is human capacity for work a distinguishing characteristic when compared to that of more powerful animals. Not even

language defines the essence of what is human, for we know of numerous animals that make use of various codes and forms of communication. Each new human being, on the other hand, comes into a world that has been modified by others, and as the human being is constituted by that world of intentions I discover the human capacity to accumulate and incorporate into the temporal. That is, I discover not simply the social dimension but the *historical-social* dimension of the human being.

With these things in mind, we can attempt the following definition of the human being: *Human beings are historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature.* If I accept this definition, I will also have to accept that this is a being that can, intentionally, transform its physical constitution. And indeed, that is something we see happening. This process began with the use of instruments that, arrayed before the body as external "prostheses," allowed human beings to extend their reach, to extend and amplify their senses, and to increase their strength and the quality of their work. Though not endowed with the ability to function in aerial or aquatic environments, they have nonetheless created the means to move through these media, and have even begun to emigrate from their natural environment, the planet Earth. Today, moreover, human beings have begun to penetrate into the interior of their own bodies, transplanting organs, intervening in their neurochemistry, practicing *in vitro* fertilization, and even manipulating their genes.

If by the word "nature" we have wanted to signify something fixed and unchanging, then it's a seriously deficient idea, even when applied to what is most object-like about the human being, that is, the body. In light of this, it is clear that nothing of what is termed "natural morality" or "natural law" or "natural institutions" exists through nature; on the contrary, all of this is historico-social.

This concept of "human nature," which we reject, goes hand in hand with another very common idea that asserts the supposed "passivity" of the consciousness. This ideology looks at the human being as an entity that functions in response to stimuli from the natural world. What began as crude sensualism has little by little been displaced by historicist currents that, at their core, have preserved the same conception of a passive consciousness. And even when they emphasize the activity of consciousness in and transformation of the world over the interpretation of its activities, they still conceive of its activity as resulting from conditions external to the consciousness.

Those old prejudices concerning human nature and the passivity of consciousness appear today as neo-evolutionary theories, where natural selection is determined through the struggle for the survival of the fittest. In the version currently in fashion, this zoological conception, now transposed into the human world, attempts to move beyond prior dialectics of race or class by asserting a dialectic in which it is supposed that all social activity is self-regulated thanks to "natural" economic laws. Thus, once again, the concrete human being is objectified and submerged.

We are only touching on those conceptual schemes that, in order to explain the human being, have begun from theoretical generalities and maintained the existence of a human nature and a passive consciousness. In contrast to these ideas, we maintain the need to begin from human particularity, we maintain that the human being is a *socio-historical* and *non-natural* phenomenon and, further, that human consciousness is active in transforming the world in accordance with its intention. We view human life as always taking place *in situation,* and the human body as an immediately perceived natural object, which at the same time is subject to numerous dictates of the individual's intentionality.

The following questions therefore arise: (1) How is it that the consciousness is active—that is, how is it that it can operate intentionally on the body and, through the body, transform the world? (2) How is it that the human being is constituted as a *socio-historical* being?

These questions must be answered starting from concrete existence, so as not to fall once again into theoretical generalities and some consequent system of interpretation. To answer the first question will require us to apprehend through immediate evidence how human intention acts upon the body. To answer the second, we must begin from evidence of temporality and intersubjectivity in the human being, rather than beginning from general laws of history and society.

Let us look at the first point. In order to extend my arm, open my hand, and pick up an object, I need to receive information about the position of my arm and hand. I receive this information thanks to kinesthetic and coenesthetic perceptions—that is, perceptions from my intrabody. I am equipped with sensors that accomplish these specialized tasks in the same way that my external senses do through their tactile, auditory, and other sensory organs. I also gather visual data about the distance from my body to the object. That is, before extending my arm, I have assimilated complex information in what might be called a “structure of perception,” not in some aggregate of separate perceptions. Thus, as I prepare to pick up the object, I select some information and I discard other information that is not relevant. Any explanation of this phenomenon in which I am characterized as perceiving passively is not sufficient to explain how I am able to guide this structure of perception that corresponds to my having the intention to pick up the object. The insufficiency of such passive explanations is even clearer to me as I begin to move my hand and arm, adjusting my movements in response to feedback from the data that my senses are continually sending me. Nor can the action of putting my arm into motion and readjusting its trajectory be explained simply in terms of perception.

To avoid confusing the various registers in this experiment, I decide to close my eyes and locate myself in front of the object and to carry out the operations with my arm and hand. Once again I register the internal sensations; but, lacking sight, my calculation of distance becomes awkward. If I mistake the position of the object and represent or imagine it in a place different from where it actually is, my hand will not encounter it. That is, my hand will go instead in the direction that has been delineated by my visual representations. I experience much the same thing with the other external senses that bring in information on phenomena, and to which images correspond that are apparently “copies” of the perception. Thus, I have gustatory and olfactory images, images corresponding to other external senses, as well as images corresponding to internal senses such as position, movement, pain, acidity, internal pressure, and so on.

Following this line, I discover that it is images that impart activity to the body—images that, while they do reproduce perception, have great mobility, fluctuating and transforming both voluntarily and involuntarily. Here I should note that in the view of naive psychology, images were seen as passive, serving only as the basis for memory; therefore, to the extent that images diverged from the dictatorship of perception they fell into the category of senseless ravings, delirium devoid of meaning. At one time an entire educational system was based on the cruel repetition of memorized texts. Creativity and comprehension were minimized for, as we have said, consciousness was seen as being passive. But let’s continue.

It is clear that I also have a perception of the image, which enables me to distinguish one image from another, just as I distinguish among diverse perceptions. Or can I not call up images from memory, represent things previously imagined? Let’s see. If I now, with my eyes open,

perform the action of picking up an object, I may not be able to perceive how the image progressively superimposes itself on the perception. But if, while looking, I also imagine the same object in a false position (different from where it actually is), then even though I am still seeing it in its true position, I notice that my hand will tend to move toward the imagined object, not toward the one I see. It is, then, the *image* and not simple perception that determines my action toward the object. Some will counter this argument with the example of the short reflex arc, which bypasses the cerebral cortex, since it terminates at the level of the medulla, and produces a response even before the stimulus can be analyzed. However, if by this the critic means simply that there are automatic responses that require no conscious activity, then of course one can list a multitude of such involuntary, natural operations common to both the human body and those of many animals. But while such responses certainly exist, they explain nothing regarding the problem of the image.

I would add that this superimposition of images on perception is something that occurs in all cases, even though we cannot always see it with the same clarity as when we represented an imaginary object in a location beside the perceived object. We should bear in mind that the mere fact of visually imagining the movement of my arm does not make my arm move. My arm will move when an image that corresponds to internal perceptions of the appropriate level is fired off toward the intrabody. What happens with the visual image is that it delineates the path along which my arm will have to move. We can see this taking place in the state of sleep when, despite a tremendous proliferation of images, the sleeper's body remains still. In this case it is clear that the landscape of representation is internalized, so that the images go toward the intrabody and not toward the layers of musculature. While we are asleep our external senses draw inward, as do the paths traced by the images. If we were to consider the example of the agitation that occurs in "nightmares" or during somnambulism, we would say that from the level of *deep sleep* one passes to the level of *active semi-sleep;* the external senses are active and images begin to be present at a more external level, thus setting the body in motion. We will not go into the subject of the space of representation here, nor of the translation, distortion, and transformation of impulses; these subjects are, however, further developed in the essay "Psychology of the Image," which is included in the volume *Contributions to Thought.* With what we have seen so far we can move on to other ideas, such as those of *copresence,* the *temporal structure of consciousness,* the *look,* and the *landscape.*

Let us suppose that one day I go into my room, and upon seeing the window I recognize it—it is familiar to me. I have a new perception of it, but also at work are earlier perceptions retained as images. But then I notice that in one corner of the windowpane there is a crack. "That wasn't there before," I say to myself, comparing the new perception with what I retain from previous perceptions. In addition, I experience a sort of surprise. The "window" of former acts of perception has remained with me, although not passively like a photograph but actively as is characteristic of images. That which I have retained from past perceptions is acting when confronted with what I now perceive, even though its formation belongs to the past. This is a past that is always with me, always present. Before I entered my room I took it for granted that the window would be there, just as before. This is not something that I was *thinking*—it was something I simply took for granted. It was not that the window in particular was present in my thoughts at that moment; rather, it was *copresent,* it was within the horizon of objects contained in my room.

It is thanks to copresence, the retention that is made present and superimposed on perception, that consciousness infers more than it perceives. In phenomenon of copresence, we

find *belief* functioning in its most elementary form. In our example, it's as though I told myself, "That's strange—I had thought that the window was fine."

Let's look further. If when I entered my room there had appeared a phenomenon belonging to a different field of objects—for example, an airplane engine or a hippopotamus—I would have found that surreal situation to be unbelievable, not because those objects do not exist but rather precisely because their appearance in my bedroom would be outside the field of the copresence corresponding to what I remember, what I retain, of my room. Now, I had gone to my room guided by an intention, guided by images of getting a pen. As I walked, perhaps momentarily forgetful of my objective, the images of what I was going to do in the immediate future (get a pen) continued acting copresently. The future for the consciousness was brought into the present, was part of the present. Unfortunately, I found the windowpane broken, and my original intention (to get a pen) was replaced by the need to solve this other pressing problem. Now, at any present instant of my consciousness I can observe the intersection of retentions and futurizations that act copresently and in structure. The present instant is constituted in my consciousness as an active temporal field comprised of the three different times. Seen in this way, things are very different from events in calendar time, in which today is not touched by yesterday or by tomorrow. On the calendar and on the clock "now" is clearly differentiated from "no longer" and "not yet," and, in addition, events are ordered in a linear succession, one after another. And I simply cannot claim that this grouping within a total series that I call the "calendar" is a structure. We will return to this theme when we consider the subject of historicity and temporality.

For now, let's continue with what we were saying about the way that consciousness infers more than it perceives; about the way that things coming from the past, as retention, superimpose themselves on present perception. In each *look* that I launch toward an object I see things in a distorted way. We are not saying this in the sense proper to modern science, which clearly tells us that we are unable to measure with certainty both the location and velocity of an atom or to perceive wavelengths above or below our thresholds of perception; we are saying it with reference to the way the images of retentions and futurizations, memory and imagination, superimpose themselves on perceptions. Thus, when I witness a beautiful sunrise in the countryside, the natural landscape that I observe is not determined in itself—I determine it, I constitute it according to an aesthetic ideal that I hold, perhaps related to a contrast with city life, and perhaps related to that special someone who is there beside me and the suggestion that this light awakens in me, like a hope for an open future. That special peace that I experience gives me the illusion that I am contemplating passively, when in reality I am actively superimposing many contents on the simple natural object. This is true not only for this example but for any *look* that I launch toward reality.

In "Historiological Discussions," the second essay in *Contributions to Thought,* I noted that the natural destiny of the body is the world, and it is sufficient to observe the body's shape and formation to confirm this. Its senses and its apparatuses for obtaining nourishment, for locomotion, reproduction, and so on, are naturally shaped to be in the world. In addition, the image launches its transformative charge through the body; it does so not to produce a copy of the world, to be a reflection of the situation as given, but quite the opposite—to modify that previously given situation. In this way, objects are limitations or amplifications of corporal possibilities, and bodies around me appear as factors that multiply those possibilities, to the extent that those bodies are governed by intentions that I recognize as similar to those that govern my own body.

Human beings need to transform the world and to transform themselves, because of the situation of finitude and temporo-spatial limitation in which they find themselves and which they register as physical *pain* and mental *suffering*. So it is that overcoming pain is not simply an animal response, it is a temporal configuration in which the future is primary and that becomes a fundamental impulse of life, even though it may not be felt with urgency at any given moment. Therefore, apart from any immediate, reflex, and natural response, the *deferred* response to avoid pain is prompted by psychological suffering in the face of danger, and it is represented either as future possibility or as present fact when pain is present in other human beings. Overcoming pain appears, then, as a basic project that guides action. It is what has made possible communication among diverse bodies and intentions in what we call "social constitution." Social constitution is as historical as human life itself; it configures human life. Its transformation is continuous, but in a way that is different from that of nature, where changes do not occur due to intention. Social organization continues and expands, but this cannot occur solely through the presence of social objects which, even though they are carriers of human intentions, are unable to continue expanding of their own accord.

Continuity is given by generations of human beings, which do not stand "one beside the other" but instead continually interact with and transform one another. These generations, which allow continuity and development, are dynamic structures—they are social time in motion, without which society would fall into a state of nature and lose its character as society. It happens, in addition, that in every historical moment there coexist several generations at various temporal levels, with differing retentions and futurizations that configure differing landscapes of situation and belief. For the active generations, the bodies and behaviors of children and the elderly demonstrate the condition that they are moving from or toward. In turn, for the extremes of that triple relation, one can also determine corresponding extreme locations of temporality. But this structure never remains static, because while the active generations grow old and the elderly die, children are growing up and transforming and beginning to occupy active positions. Meanwhile, new births continually reconstitute society.

When in the abstract we "stop" this unceasing flow, we can speak of a "historical moment," in which all the members who are standing on the same social stage can be considered as contemporaries, living "at the same time"—but we observe that they are not, in their interior temporality, coetaneous with respect to their landscapes of formation and education, current situations, and future projects. In reality, the generational dialectic arises between the contiguous strata, which contend for the center of activity, the social present, in accordance with their own interests and beliefs. Historical becoming, then, is explained by this internal social temporality in which interacts all that the various generations have produced, and not as a succession of phenomena set down linearly, one after another, as in calendar time, as naive historiography would have it.

Constituted socially within a historical world in which I am constantly configuring my landscape, I interpret that toward which I direct my *look.* This is my personal landscape, but it is also a collective landscape that larger human groups are also responding to at the same moment. As discussed before, several generations coexist in one present moment. As a very simple example, consider how in the same moment there are living some born before the transistor was invented and others born in the computer age. There are many generational configurations that differ in their experiences, in their ways of doing things, and also in their ways of thinking and feeling—and what, at one time, used to function in social relationships and in the mode of production, may slowly (or at times quite rapidly) cease to function. We were

expecting one result in the future and that future arrived, but things did not turn out as we expected. Neither earlier actions, sensibility, nor ideology coincide with the new landscape that is gradually imposing itself socially.

To round out this outline of the ideas contained in these books that are now being published, I will note that because of human beings' *opening* and their freedom to choose among situations, to defer responses and to imagine their futures, they are thus also able to deny or negate themselves, to deny or negate aspects of their bodies, even to negate themselves completely as in suicide, or to negate other human beings. This freedom has also made it possible for a few to illegitimately appropriate for themselves the social whole—that is, to deny freedom and intentionality to others, thereby reducing these other human beings to prostheses, to instruments of the intentions of those few. Therein lies the essence of discrimination, whether its methodology is physical, economic, sexual, racial, or religious violence. Violence can be established and perpetuated through the management of the apparatus of social regulation and control—that is, the State. As a consequence, social organization requires an advanced type of coordination that will be safe from any concentration of power, whether private or State. Ordinarily, however, the State apparatus is confused with social reality, and so we should make it clear that since it is society and not the State that is the producer of goods, the ownership of the means of production should, coherently with this, be social.

Necessarily, those who have diminished the humanity of others have thereby given rise to new pain and suffering, reintroducing into the heart of society that age-old struggle against natural adversity—but now as a struggle between those who want to "naturalize" others, society, and History on the one hand, and those who are oppressed and need to humanize themselves in humanizing the world, on the other. To *humanize* is to release ourselves from objectification in order to affirm the *intentionality* of every human being and the primacy of the *future* over the present situation. It is the representation of a possible and better future that allows the transformation of the present and makes possible all revolution and all change. Thus, the pressure of oppressive conditions is not in itself sufficient to mobilize change; people must be aware that change is possible and that change depends on human actions. This struggle is not one between blind, mechanical forces; it is not a reflection of nature. It is a struggle between *human intentions.* And this is precisely what allows us to speak of oppressors and the oppressed, of the just and the unjust, of heroes and cowards. It is the only thing that allows us to meaningfully practice social solidarity and to commit ourselves to the liberation of those who suffer discrimination, whether they are a minority or the majority.

Finally, as to the *meaning* of human actions, we do not believe that human actions are a meaningless convulsion, a "useless passion," an endeavor that will end in the dissolution of the absurd. We think that *valid actions* are those that end in others, going in the direction of their freedom. Nor do we believe that the destiny of humanity is fixed by prior causes that invalidate all possible effort. Rather, we believe that human destiny is determined by an intention that, as it becomes ever more conscious in the peoples of the world, opens the way toward *a universal human nation.*

Thank you very much.

Letters to My Friends

(*Cartas a Mis Amigos*)

Mapocho Station Cultural Center, Santiago, Chile
May 14, 1994

I wish to thank the institutions that have organized the First Conference on Humanist Culture for inviting me to present this book, *Letters to My Friends,* upon its publication in Chile. I appreciate the remarks by Felipe García as representative of the publisher, Virtual Editions, and I value the comments by Volodia Teitelboim. I hope one day to be able to respond in kind to the many brilliant concepts he has offered us today and to comment in the detail that they deserve. I am also very grateful for the presence of distinguished members from the world of culture, the press, and, of course, the many friends who are with us today.

In the brief remarks that follow I would like to provide some context for the book that is being presented here today, stressing that it is not a systematic work but rather a series of commentaries presented in the well-known and often used epistolary form. Since the time of Seneca's *Moral Epistles,* there has come down to us a long tradition of such works that have spread throughout the world and, of course, had varying degrees of influence and evoked varying degrees of interest. Today we are all familiar with "open letters" which, though addressed to one particular person or institution or government, are in fact written with the intention that they be read well beyond the explicit recipient—that is, they are intended for the public at large. The present work has been conceived with that same intention.

The complete title of this volume is *Letters to My Friends: On Social and Personal Crisis in Today's World.* And who are the "friends" to whom these missives are addressed? They include all those people who, whether they agree or disagree with our ideological position, share the genuine intention of coming to a greater understanding and developing more appropriate and effective actions in order to overcome the crisis in which we are now living. These are the people to whom the letters are addressed.

As for the subject matter, the letters outline the scope of the crisis in which both societies and individuals are now immersed. I use the word "crisis" in its usual sense—a situation that can be resolved in one of several possible directions, something that carries us from one situation into a new and different one that may in turn present its own problems. Although a crisis is popularly understood as a dangerous or perilous phase, out of it can come something either beneficial or harmful to those entities that pass through it; and in this case, those passing through the crisis include both society and the individual. For some it may seem redundant to include individuals, since they are implied when we speak of society, but from our point of view that is not correct, and the attempt to make either one of these terms disappear rests on an analysis that we do not share. These are my comments about the title of the book.

Now then, a reasonable ordering of this presentation would dictate that we begin with a consideration of the work's contents. Rather than following that conventional approach, however, I would instead prefer to examine the intention that shaped this volume as a whole—an intention to assemble in one place and present the ideas of New Humanism, ideas that bear on the situation we are presently living in. Today New Humanism is sounding a

warning about the worldwide crisis our civilization is facing, and it proposes some minimal measures to be taken in order to overcome this crisis. New Humanism is conscious of the apocalyptic atmosphere that historically accompanies times such as these that mark the end not only of a century but also of a millennium. We know that at such critical junctures of human time, those who would proclaim the end of the world will raise their voices and that those voices, translated within the context of distinct folklores, will announce the end of the ecosystem, or the end of History, or the end of ideologies, or the end of the human being as a slave to machines, and so on. New Humanism subscribes to none of these visions. It says, simply: "Listen, friends, we need to change the direction we're going in!" But what if no one wants to listen? Or what if we're mistaken? Well then, so much the better, because, if we're mistaken, then things are already on the right track, and we're even now on the path to a Paradise on Earth.

There are structuralists who tell us that today's crisis is simply a readjustment in the established system, a necessary realignment of the elements in a system that is continuing to progress. There are postmodernists who maintain that it is a question of a nineteenth-century discourse that simply no longer fits, and that, thanks to current technological and communicational transparency, society's decision-makers are making available increased power and pacification. And so, my friends, we can all rest easy, trusting in the New Order to bring peace to our world. We will see no more Yugoslavias, Middle Easts, Burundis, or Sri Lankas. There will be no more hunger or starvation—no longer will 80 percent of the world population live at or below the subsistence level. No more recessions, layoffs, or downsizing—we'll see an end to the destruction of the sources of employment. From now on we'll see governments that are increasingly honest and free of corruption; we'll see rising levels of literacy and education, and declining crime and urban insecurity, along with decreasing alcoholism and drug addiction. In short, we'll see growing harmony and happiness for all. And that's good, my friends, for Paradise is at hand, if only we will be patient… But what if Paradise isn't just around the corner? What if the current situation continues to deteriorate or even spins out of control? What alternatives will we have then?

That is the focus of the discourse in *Letters to My Friends.* And we trust that no one will be offended if we consider, simply by way of timidly offering our opinion, the possibility that all of this could have a less-than-happy ending. No one is offended that buildings are equipped with fire escapes in case of fire or that movie theaters and other public places are equipped with fire extinguishers and emergency exits. No one protests because sports stadiums have additional gates that can be opened if the need should arise. But, of course, when you go to the movies or enter a building you aren't thinking about fires or catastrophes—all of this is simply part of being prudent. And if the building or the theater doesn't burn down, if there's no problem at the stadium, then so much the better!

The sixth letter contains the "Statement of the Humanist Movement," which expresses our movement's most general ideas, its alternative to the present crisis. It is not the statement of killjoys or fatalists, it is not a set of pessimistic ideas—it is simply a straightforward description of the crisis and a presentation of alternatives. When you read this statement, even those of you who do not agree with much of it, you should still be able to say: "Well, it *is* an alternative. We should listen to what these people are saying—societies, too, need their fire escapes. These people aren't our enemies—they're the voice of survival."

The "Statement of the Humanist Movement," found in the sixth letter, says the following:

> Humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd.… Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a *universal human nation.* While understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate environments. Humanists seek not a uniform world, but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and creativity. Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. *Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else*.

The statement then concludes:

> Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organization in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

Isn't this statement filled with a strong sense of freedom, of pluralism, along with an awareness of its own limits? It seems to me that it can rightly be called an alternative—in no sense is it an overpowering or absolutist statement calling for uniformity.

And what is this process of crisis like? Where is it taking us? The various letters share a common concern that is centered on the single model—the model of the *closed system*—that began with the rise of capitalism, and was given further strength by the Industrial Revolution. Nation states in the hands of an increasingly powerful bourgeoisie began to contend for domination of the world. Colonies passed from crowned heads into the hands of private companies. And banks began to perform their tasks of intermediation, putting third parties in debt and steadily gaining control over the sources of production. The banks financed the military campaigns of the ambitious bourgeoisies, lending money to all parties in any conflict, running them into debt and managing to make money out of nearly every conflict. While the bourgeoisies of different nations were still viewing growth in terms of the harsh exploitation of the working class, industrial growth, and trade—always taking as their center of gravity the particular country in which each one operated—the banks had already begun to leap beyond the administrative limitations of the nation state.

Then came the socialist revolutions and the stock market crash, yet neither of these prevented the financial centers from continuing to grow and to concentrate ever greater wealth, even as they underwent adjustments. Then came the last nationalistic gasp of the industrial bourgeoisies and the Second World War. And finally it was clear that the world was now one, that the regions, countries, and continents were all interconnected, and that industry needed international financial capital in order to survive. By this time the national state was beginning to pose an obstacle to the global movement of capital, goods, services, people, and products. As a result, regionalization began, and with it the old order began to destructure.

The old proletariat who had long been the base of a social pyramid rooted in primary extractive industries gradually began to swell the ranks of the industrial workers, and thereby to

lose uniformity. Secondary and tertiary industries along with an increasingly sophisticated service sector began to absorb labor in a constant conversion and reconversion of the elements of production. The old guilds, brotherhoods, and unions lost their class-based power, reducing their focus to short-term issues like salary and job benefits. The technological revolution continued to produce increasing accelerations in a world of inequalities in which vast regions whose development had been held back grew more and more distant from the centers of decision-making. Those despoiled colonized regions, assigned in the international division of labor to be only the producers of raw materials, were obliged to sell their production for lower and lower prices, while having to buy at ever higher prices the technology needed for their own development. Meanwhile, the debts incurred on their behalf in order to participate in the model of development imposed on them continued to swell.

Eventually, there came a moment when companies had to become more flexible, to decentralize, to become more streamlined in order to compete and survive. Rigid structures in both capitalist and socialist worlds began to splinter, as increasingly onerous financial burdens were imposed in order to fuel the inexorable growth of their respective military-industrial complexes. All of this finally led up to one of the most critical moments in the history of humanity—the threat of nuclear confrontation—to which the socialist camp responded by initiating a process of unilateral disarmament. Only the future will tell whether that was an error, or precisely what saved our world from nuclear holocaust.

The sequence of events we have described is easily recognized, and it has led us to a world in which the concentration of financial power has finally laid prostrate before it all industry, all trade, all politics, every country, every individual. The phase of the *closed system* has begun in earnest, and in a closed system there is no alternative to destructuring. From this perspective, the disintegration within the socialist camp appears as but a prelude to a worldwide process of destructuring that is happening with dizzying speed.

Such is the moment of crisis in which we find ourselves today. Yet there are several possible ways in which this crisis can be resolved. For simple economy of hypothesis and to provide examples in broad outline, the letters sketch out two basic possibilities: on the one hand, the variant of increasing entropy within a closed system and, on the other, the *opening* of this closed system through the non-natural and intentional actions of the human being. Let’s look at the first alternative, which we will present in a descriptive, somewhat picturesque way.

As events unfold, it is highly probable that we will witness the consolidation of a global empire that will tend to homogenize the economy, law, communications, values, language, habits, and customs. This global empire, orchestrated by international financial capital, will not bother to take into consideration even the populations that inhabit the centers of decision-making. And in that concentration, the social fabric will continue unraveling. Political and social organizations, the administration of the State, all will be under the management of technocrats in the service of a monstrous Parastate that will tend to discipline the populations with increasingly restrictive measures as the decomposition intensifies. The capacity for abstract thought will be all but lost, as it continues to be replaced by the computational paradigm of analytical, sequential functioning. All notion of process and structure will be lost, giving way to simplistic studies along the lines of linguistics and formal analysis. Fashion, language, social styles, music, architecture, the plastic arts, literature—all will become destructured. And in every field this bewildering mixture of styles will be hailed as a great advance, just as has occurred at other moments of history with the eclecticism so characteristic of imperial decadence.

Then the ancient hope of bringing everything together in uniformity in the hands of a single power will vanish forever. This darkening of reason, this exhaustion of the peoples of the Earth, will leave the field wide open for fanaticism of every stripe, for the negation of life, for the cult of suicide, for unbridled fundamentalisms. No longer will there be science or great revolutions in thought. Everything will be reduced to technology, though it will then be called “science.” There will be renewed virulence in parochialism, factionalism, and ethnic struggles, and the populations of those countries left behind by the developed nations will sweep over the centers of decision-making in a whirlwind in which the macro-cities, before so overcrowded, will become depopulated. Chronic civil wars will wrack our poor planet, on which people will no longer want to live. In short, this is a tale repeated in many civilizations that in their day believed in their own unending progress. And all of those cultures ended finally in decline and disintegration. But fortunately, when one fell, elsewhere in the world new human initiatives would arise, and in that alternation of falling and rising civilizations, the old would be surpassed by the new. It is clear, however, that in today’s single, closed, worldwide system, there is no place “outside” in which another civilization might arise—leaving little possibility for anything other than a long and global Dark Ages.

If what is said in the letters regarding the foregoing turns out to be incorrect, then we have nothing to worry about. If, on the other hand, the mechanical process of historical structures is carrying us in the direction outlined above, then it’s time we asked ourselves how human beings can change the current direction of events. And who will be able to produce this formidable change in direction if not the people themselves, who are precisely the subject of history? Have we reached a state of sufficient maturity to understand that from now on there will be no progress unless it is *by all and for all?* That is the second hypothesis explored in the letters.

If among the peoples of the world the idea takes hold (and it is good to repeat it) that there will be no progress unless it is *by all and for all,* then the direction of the struggle will be clear. In the last phase of this destructuring, new winds will begin to blow at the social base, at the grass roots. In ordinary neighborhoods, in the humblest workplaces, the social fabric will begin to regenerate. And this will apparently be a spontaneous phenomenon, which will be echoed in the appearance of a multitude of grassroots groups made up of working people, now freed from domination by their union leaderships. Great numbers of decentralized political groupings will appear and will clash with the established political organizations, which are led by increasingly isolated elites. Fresh debate will begin in every factory, every office, every business. Short-range demands will give way to a consciousness of the broader situation, in which labor will have greater human value than capital, and in which the risk of labor will be clearer than the risk of capital when it comes time to set priorities. People will easily come to the conclusion that a company’s earnings should be reinvested in opening new sources of employment, or be applied in other areas where production is still increasing, rather than as now being diverted into speculation, which only winds up fattening the pockets of Capital while wiping out entire industries and leading to the general bankruptcy of the apparatus of production. Finally, businessmen will begin to realize that they, too, have been reduced to mere employees of the bank, and that in this emergency workers have now become their natural ally.

Social unrest will again intensify, unleashing an open, direct struggle between speculative capital in its stark character of an abstract, inhuman force, and the forces of labor—the true lever of transformation of the world. People will begin to understand that progress depends not on usurious debt contracted with banks, but rather that banks should grant credit to businesses without charging interest. And it will also be clear that there is no way to unblock the growing

concentration of capital and power that is leading everything toward collapse, except through a redistribution of wealth to those regions of the world long left behind on the economic margins. Real, direct democracy based on plebiscites will then be a necessity, because people will want to move beyond the agony of non-participation and the constant threat of social unrest. The powers of government will be reformed, as today's formal democracy, so dependent on financial capital, loses all credibility and meaning.

This second possible scenario will doubtless come about only after an incubation period in which the problems will continue to intensify. Then there will begin a period of two steps forward and one step back in which each success will be multiplied in a *demonstration effect* that will reach even the most remote corners of the Earth, thanks to instant means of communication. This is not about the taking of power in nation states but about a worldwide process in which these new social phenomena, which are the precursors of a radical change in the direction of events, will continue to multiply. In this way, instead of the process of change ending in the mechanical collapse we have seen repeated so many times before, we will see the will to change and the peoples of the Earth beginning to travel the road toward a *universal human nation.*

This second possibility is the alternative on which the Humanists of today stake their futures. They have too much faith in the human being to think that everything will end stupidly. And even though they do not feel themselves to be the vanguard of the human process, they are willing to accompany this process to the full extent of their powers and from the positions in which they happen to find themselves.

I will not take up any more of your time in talking about this book that we have in our hands today, and I would simply like to thank you for the patience and tolerance you have shown in following this somewhat tedious exposition.

That's all. Thank you very much.

III. Talks

Humanism and the New World

Universidad de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, July 7, 1991

Today's subject of "Humanism and the New World" can benefit from a little context. When people speak of "Humanism," they are most often referring to the current of thought that, while contemporaneous with the development of the Renaissance, began in literature with Petrarch. We can also observe how, in other civilizations, even some far-removed from Renaissance Europe, many subjects are treated from a standpoint similar to that of the Renaissance Humanists. Those currents of Roman culture that draw their name from Cicero are an example of this. Humanists have traditionally conceived of the human being not simply as the subject and producer of the historical event, but as the center of all fundamental activity. The human being was also the highest rung in an axiology that might be summarized in this way: Nothing above the human being, and no human being above any other.

During the Renaissance in particular, we can see the full dimension of the word "humanism" in the struggle initiated by Art and Science against obscurantism. Though it would take too long today to talk about the contributions of historical figures such as Giordano Bruno, Pico della Mirandola and, of course, Galileo—who are venerated by contemporary humanists—all of these thinkers suffered persecution at the hands of a system in which the true dimensions of the human being were cut off, a system where, above everything else, stood a deity and its subsidiaries: first the Prince, then the State, then its Laws.

The eruption of Humanism onto the scene turned that old scale of values on its head, and suddenly there stood in the very center of the stage the soul and the body of the human being. This emerging current of thought, often borrowing concepts from Greek and Roman paganism and strongly imbued with Neo-Platonic and Neo-Pythagorean tendencies, unleashed a heated debate in the Europe of old.

Simultaneously, Europe was beginning to extend its influence over the Americas, colonizing and conquering, and, logically, carrying this out not with the progressive elements that were then gaining ground in courtly circles, but rather with the brutality and ideology that were still in season—that is, obscurantism and monarchy by divine right. The Inquisition and the persecution of free thought were thus exported to the new lands, but also, though silently in the beginning, came the ideas that would later ignite in the French Revolution and in the wars and revolutions of independence in the Americas.

It was the development of this humanist, anthropocentric vision that finally ushered in the modern age. This vision expressed itself not only in art and science, but also in the politics of the time, in the growing attempts to check the monarchy and ecclesiastical power. Irrespective of the acceptance or rejection Humanism met with during this period, special recognition must be given to the contribution this movement made to the thinking and events of the age that, at least in the West, ushered in the age of revolutions in all its dimensions.

Today, in the twilight of the revolutions, that vibrant humanism seems likewise to be in decline, facing as it is the rise of a technology that appears to have absorbed the revolutionary transformation of economic-social structures, to have stripped political discourse of all real communication, to have replaced the ideas of Fraternity and Solidarity with the economics of competition and the market, with laws of self-regulation, with the cold variables of macroeconomics. An empty scale of values is being built in its place, where the concrete human being is displaced from the central position and the worship of money installed in its stead. Naturally, in this contemporary myth there is a justifying ideology—the ideology of the End of Ideologies and the End of History, in which we can recognize the chords of pragmatism that were first struck toward the middle of the nineteenth century.

In my view, this elementary pragmatism—based on a Neodarwinism that zoologizes society by characterizing it as underlain by a struggle for the survival of the fittest—has gained ground not because of any exceptional quality but because, due to many factors, the great systems of thought have collapsed. Today what we are witnessing is a vast emptiness, a vacuum left by the failure of structured systems and structured systems of thought, a vacuum that can now be filled by anything, no matter that it is of inferior quality, so long as it satisfies the interests of those who control the financial springs and levers.

I realize that what I have been saying must, of course, be more fully justified and substantiated, which would give rise to a long and wide-ranging discussion. Yet I have briefly underscored some points that seem to me important in understanding the situation of Humanism in the present moment. At any rate, I should stress that those currents of thought that have taken up Humanism in this century have in reality been very few.

We can recognize a reclaiming of the question in Sartre's *Existentialism* (*L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*) and in Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," productions that, though in some way opposed, can both be located within the line of existentialist humanism. We should also mention the pseudo-humanism of a Christian stamp represented by Maritain, the Marxist counter-humanism of Althusser, and the dialectic in Marxism between bourgeois humanism and proletarian humanism in Aníbal Ponce.

I would like to comment very briefly on the currents of contemporary thought that attempt to reformulate humanism theoretically, and I will simply note the two principal variants: the Christian and the existentialist. The word "Humanism," however, has gone beyond that division and has become well accepted in the popular mind as though it simply denoted any attitude that favors the human being and opposes the advance of technology and the mechanization of the world. In this sense it appears today to be what we might call "in good taste" to profess a fashionable humanism, but in a way that has nothing whatever to do with its arduous and tragic development, and even less with its precise framing and context, regarding which I ask you to allow me to cite some essential characteristics:

1. The affirmation of human consciousness as *active,* as opposed to positions that consider consciousness to be a "reflection" of objective conditions.
2. The historicity of the human being and human productions, which means that the human being is not a *natural* being but rather a *social* and *historical* being.
3. The *opening* of the human being-to-the-world, through which the dichotomies of the individual and society, subjectivity and objectivity, are resolved.
4. The basing of human action and ethics on the human being, and not on any other authority such as a deity.

Today, any consistent humanism must therefore be libertarian, active, and characterized by its solidarity with and commitment to the social reality. In no way does humanism oppose art to science, nor does it make the error of identifying art with humanism and science with technology. It conceives both terms, art and science, as included within the process of human cultural development, though it does see certain facets of technology as instruments in the service of those who would arrogate all economic power to themselves.

To center our discussion on the subject “Humanism and the New World,” let me say that the conquest and subjugation of the cultures of the Americas by the European powers had nothing to do with a dialectic between culture and technology, but rather reflects the social model that—for five hundred years from the first contacts until only a short time ago—flourished in the warmth of obscurantism and absolutist institutions. This was a historical, political, and social phenomenon, and not a long process to which the nations and popular classes of Europe were committed, since the working classes of Europe were, of course, every bit as oppressed as their counterparts in other parts of the world. Furthermore, both European humanists and later humanists of the Americas suffered the same persecution on both continents, until that moment when they were finally able to make their contribution to revolutionary change, also in both the Old World and the New.

But today, new dangers threaten Latin America, and particularly this country, Mexico, with its unique cultural profile. Shall we set in motion a misconceived dialectic between culture and technology, or instead place the emphasis on our vibrant distinctiveness and catch up with those other regions of the world that today seem to be monopolizing science and technology? These subjects, of such enormous importance, should not be ignored or passed over without reflection. That is why I propose the formation of a commission to study them, which can carry these concerns across the breadth of the Americas, with the proposal of establishing an ongoing conference to examine and discuss the relationship between culture and technology, hopefully beginning in the year 1992, the year that will mark five hundred years since the European arrival in the New World. Today, as then, a struggle is beginning that must be pondered and appreciated in all its dimensions, and I believe that this country, Mexico, should be the physical and cultural center of that debate.

Thank you very much.

Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization

Academy of Sciences, Moscow, June 18, 1992

I wish to thank the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, the Club for Humanist Initiatives, the representatives from the various fields of culture who are present today, as well as the translators and publishers of my works, and the many friends who have invited me to speak today. I thank the media who are here and, of course, I thank all of you for your presence.

You will, I am sure, forgive some of the difficulties related to the fact that my remarks must be interpreted into Russian, and thus appreciate the fact that I am obliged to limit the length of my talk because of the time that requires. Given these circumstances, more than one idea will have to be compressed or treated in a somewhat summary way.

Our subject, "Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization," requires us, as a first step and before developing today's theme, to examine the concept of "civilization." Much has been written and much debated about the word "civilization." In the early period of the Philosophy of History, an understanding developed regarding the various civilizations as historical entities, each with its own process, its own evolution, its own destiny. This entity, a civilization, was taken to be an ambit, a region of human behaviors that would allow us to identify nations or peoples with a certain mode of production, certain social relationships, a specific legal system, and a characteristic scale of values. In general, the idea of "a people" or "a nation" was not equated with that of "civilization"; instead, a number of peoples or nations, spanning borders and territories, could be grouped together within a common ambit. Traditionally, civilizations have been associated with what could be called "cultural spaces" that were generally rooted within certain geographical boundaries and viewed as having the ability both to radiate outward and to receive influences from other, more or less contiguous peoples or civilizations.

When we speak of the Egyptian civilization or the Greek civilization, for example, we are referring to those sorts of ambits of human behavior, and in no way are we implying that some more or less centralizing artifice such as a State is the decisive factor in the articulation of those ambits. The fact that the Macedonians or the Spartans played a role in Hellenic culture, without thereby being part of a league of city-states, and indeed the fact that they fought among themselves, shows that the State is not the essential factor in the definition of a civilization. And so it is that rootedness in a certain geographical space has traditionally allowed us to speak of the "Mesopotamian civilization" or "the civilization of the Nile" or "island civilizations," and so on. Implicit in this type of classification, of course, is a conception of the nature of civilization in which every civilization is determined by geographical circumstances—just as when we speak of the civilizations of "the vine," or of "milk and honey," or the civilizations of "maize," we are referring to them in terms of their food resources, and when we speak of "Neolithic" civilizations we are denoting the cultural stage of the civilization by its tool production and technology.

More important than this effort at classification, however, has been the work done since the time of Vico in attempting to understand and define the temporal stages of civilizations, the evolution and future of a given civilization as well as its destiny. From that *corsi e ricorsi* of human events that Vico, the genial Neapolitan, attempted to understand (on the basis of a general idea of historical development, a set of axioms, and a philological method), to the

historiology of Toynbee (based on the concept of challenge and response, in turn anticipated by Pavlov's physiological studies), a great deal of ink has been spent in trying to make a science out of these more or less vague and diffuse ideas. Naturally, these efforts have been rewarded with greater and lesser degrees of success. Comte's "law" was that civilization passed from a heroic and theological age through a metaphysical stage to, at last, a positive moment of rationality, abundance, and justice. Hegel spoke of civilizations as manifestations of the dialectical stages of the development of the Absolute Spirit, and Spengler presented civilizations as biographical protoforms, entities that proceed biologically through the stages of birth, youth, maturity, and death.

Great effort has been expended in attempting to understand the functioning and the destiny of civilizations, but many of the researchers and philosophers who have undertaken those efforts have not gone deep enough into the basic and primary fact, the recognition that their questions and their answers all arise out of their own cultural landscapes, the particular historical moments in which they live. And if today we want to find a new response to this theme of "civilization," we cannot avoid the difficulty (or aid) of the cultural landscape in which we were formed and educated, or the historical moment in which we now happen to live. Today, if we truly want to understand the flux of civilizations, we must first ask ourselves about the conditions of our own lives, and in this way we will be *humanizing* the historical process upon which we are reflecting. We do this not by interpreting the events produced by the human being from the outside, as is typically done in a history book, but rather by understanding, on the basis of historical structure, that which gives meaning to human life, that which takes place in the situation we are living in. This focus will lead us to see the limitations that we face in formulating certain questions and in giving certain answers, because the very moment in which we live makes it difficult for us to break out of our own beliefs and cultural assumptions—and it is only by breaking out of our beliefs, only through the appearance of events that we believed to be impossible, that we will be able to advance toward a new moment of civilization.

As you know, we are talking about the vital situation of crisis in which we are immersed today and, consequently, about a moment of rupture in the beliefs and cultural assumptions that formed us. To characterize the crisis from that point of view, we might attend to four phenomena that directly impact us:

1. Driven by the technological revolution, the world is changing rapidly, causing changes that clash with the established structures and habits of life of both societies and individuals.
2. The mismatch between the speed of technological acceleration and the relative slowness of social adaptation to change is generating progressive crises in every field, and there is no reason to suppose that this process will stop—indeed, quite the contrary, it will tend to increase.
3. The unexpectedness of events prevents us from foreseeing what direction those events, the people around us, and in particular our own lives will take; it is not, however, change itself that concerns us so much as the increasing unpredictability of that change.
4. Many of the things we once thought and believed are no longer useful. But neither are there solutions in sight from society, institutions, or individuals—all of whom are suffering these same difficulties. And while we need signposts and references, our traditional references are proving to be obsolete and asphyxiating.

In my view, it is in this region of the world more than any other that the greatest acceleration of conditions for historical change is taking place—a confusing and painful acceleration out of which a new moment in civilization is being born. Here, no one knows today what's going to

happen tomorrow, but in other parts of the world people naively assume that civilization will continue in a direction of predictable growth within a long-established economic and social model. Of course, that way of looking at things is more a matter of mood, something closer to wishful thinking, than it is a position justified by the facts, because as soon as one examines what is happening one arrives at the conclusion that the world—the world as a whole, not schizophrenically divided between East and West—is moving toward increasing instability. To look exclusively at one type of State, one type of administration, or one type of economy in interpreting the flow of events demonstrates an intellectual limitation and a shortsightedness that expose the foundation of beliefs we have incorporated during our cultural formation. Moreover, we can see that the social and historical landscape in which we are living has changed drastically from the one in which we lived only a few years ago, but that the instruments of analysis we are using to interpret these new situations still belong to that old landscape. Yet the difficulties are even greater, because we also have a sensibility that was formed in an earlier time, and the evolution of this sensibility has not kept pace with events. It is surely for this reason that all over the world we see a growing separation, an alienation between those who hold economic, political, artistic, and other forms of power and the new generations who feel very differently about the function that institutions and leaders ought to serve in these new times.

I believe that now is the moment to say something that will probably strike the old sensibility as scandalous, and it is this: The economic or social model that is discussed day after day by the opinion-makers is not the central interest for the new generations; rather, they wish that institutions and leaders were not just one more encumbrance on this already complicated world. They are looking for a new alternative, because to them today's models seem worn out. Yet, at the same time, they are unwilling to follow ideas or leadership that do not coincide with their new sensibility. Many people consider this irresponsible on the part of the young, but I am not talking about responsibility—I am talking about a type of *sensibility* that must be taken seriously into account. And this is not a problem that can be solved with opinion polls or surveys to find a new way of manipulating society; it is a problem involving an overall appreciation of the *meaning of the concrete human being,* who until today has been appealed to in theory and betrayed in practice.

If someone would object to these comments by replying that in this crisis the peoples of the world want concrete solutions, I would say that it is one thing to *promise* concrete solutions and something quite different to *achieve* concrete solutions in practice. What is concrete is that people no longer believe in promises, and that is much more important as a psychosocial reality than more promises of solutions that people intuitively sense will never be kept in practice. The crisis of credibility is also dangerous, because it throws us defenseless into the hands of demagoguery and the charisma of any leader promising instant solutions and able to play upon people's deepest emotions. But all of this, though I've often pointed it out, can be difficult to take in, because of the impediment posed by our landscape of formation, in which we still confuse actions with the words used to speak of these actions.

We have reached a point at which it is clear that we need to ask ourselves once and for all whether or not the *look* that we have been using in order to understand these problems is adequate to the task. What I'm saying is not really so strange, since scientists in various disciplines have long since stopped believing that they were observing reality itself and have become concerned with understanding how their act of observation affects or interferes with the phenomenon they are studying. As we would put it, this means that observers introduce

elements from their own *landscapes* that do not exist in the phenomenon being studied, and that the *look* we direct at the field of study focuses on a limited region within that ambit, so that we come to pay attention to questions that are not really of central importance. All of this becomes much more serious when people attempt to justify political positions by saying that everything they do is carried out with the human being in mind, when in fact that is not what they have in mind at all but rather other factors that end up displacing human beings to a secondary position.

Similarly, in no way is it recognized that it is only through understanding the structure of human life that we can reach a full comprehension of the realities and the destiny of civilization. This leads us to realize that the theme of human life is much talked about but not truly taken into account, because it is believed, it is accepted, that the life of human beings is not the agent and producer of events but instead only the recipient of macro-economic, ethnic, religious, or geographical forces; because the assumption is that what must be demanded of people is, objectively, labor and social discipline and, subjectively, credulity and obedience.

Having made these observations about how we might consider the phenomena of civilization—while taking into account our landscape of education and formation, our beliefs, and our values—let's now to turn our attention to the central subject of this talk.

Our present situation of crisis does not involve separate civilizations, as was the case in earlier times when those entities could interact, while ignoring or adopting elements from one another. In the process of increasing planetarization that we are experiencing today, we must interpret events as occurring in a dynamic that is both structural and global.

Yet everything we see is being destructured, fragmented: The nation state is reeling from the blows it receives from below—separatism and parochialism—and from above—regionalization and planetarization; individuals, cultural codes, languages, and goods are all mixed up together in a fantastic tower of Babel; centralized corporations are suffering the crisis of having to become more flexible in ways that they can't manage to implement; an ever-widening gap is opening between the generations, as though in the same moment there exist subcultures separated from one another not only by their pasts but also by their future projects; family members, coworkers, political, labor, and social organizations are all experiencing the action of disintegrative centrifugal forces; ideologies, tossed about in this whirlwind, are no longer able to offer answers or inspire coherent action in human groups; traditional solidarity is disappearing from a social fabric that is continuing to unravel; and finally, individuals, while today they have—especially with the mass media—ever greater numbers of people in their daily landscapes, at the same time feel increasingly isolated and cut off from others.

All of this demonstrates that even these destructuring and paradoxical events respond to the same process, which is worldwide and structural. And if the old ideologies cannot give answers to these phenomena, it is because they, too, are part of the world that is vanishing. No doubt there are many people who think that these events mark the end of ideas and the end of History, of conflict, and of human progress. For our part, this is indeed what we call "crisis," but we are very far from viewing this crisis as some final decline, because we see that in reality the dissolution of the previous forms is like outgrowing clothing that has now become too small for the human being.

These events, which have begun to occur with greater acceleration in some places sooner than in others, will soon affect the entire planet, and in those places where an unjustified sense of triumph still persists we will see before long phenomena that will be described in everyday

language as “incredible.” We are moving toward a *planetary civilization* that will present us with a new form of organization and a new scale of values. And it is inevitable that it will do so by taking as a point of departure the most important issue of our time: knowing whether we wish to live, and in what conditions we wish to do so. Surely the plans and projections of that small circle of the greedy and provisionally powerful will fail to take this issue into account, though it holds for every small, isolated, and powerless human being. On the contrary, the powerful few will continue to believe that macro-social factors are what is decisive. Given their ignorance of the needs of today’s concrete human being they will be taken by surprise—in some cases by the extent of the social despair, in other cases by the violent unrest, and in general by the escapism and fugue that take place every day through every imaginable form of drugs, neurosis, and suicide.

There can be no doubt, however, that their dehumanized projects will be bogged down in practical implementation, because twenty percent of the world’s population will be unable to maintain much longer the widening gap between itself and the eighty percent of humanity urgently in need of the minimum conditions of life. As everyone knows, this situation cannot be made to disappear simply through the ongoing activities of psychologists, pharmacists, sports spectacles, or the advice of opinion-makers. Although the sensation of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life is accentuated through the action of a powerful communications media coupled with the gigantism of public spectacle, they will not succeed in convincing us that we are ants or mere numbers and statistics.

I believe that within this crisis of civilization that we are living through today there are many positive factors that we must take advantage of, just as we take advantage of technology when it comes to health, education, and improving living conditions, and even as we reject its application in destructive directions (precisely because these directions divert it from the objective that gave it birth). Similarly, current events are contributing in a positive way, for they are leading us to reconsider everything we have believed until now, to evaluate the history of humanity from another optic, to launch our projects toward another image of the future, to look at each other with a new compassion and tolerance. Then, a new humanism will open a way through this labyrinth of history, in which we human beings have so many times believed ourselves reduced to nothing.

Today’s crisis is exploding in all directions across the entire planet and is not found simply in the Commonwealth of Independent States or in Moscow, which in their time were the most notable regions of expression of this crisis. The global civilization that is already in motion today cannot do without the initiatives of this great people, because it is upon the solutions this people finds to its problems that the future of all of us, inasmuch as we participate in the same worldwide civilization, depends.

We have spoken of the concept of civilization and how we would characterize the civilization of today that is becoming planetary; we have also touched upon the subject of crisis and the beliefs on which we rely to interpret this moment in which we are living. As for the concept of “Humanism,” which is an integral part of the title of this presentation, I only want to mention a few points. In the first place, we are not talking about historical Humanism, the Humanism of Arts and Letters that constituted the driving force of the Renaissance and broke the obscurantist bonds of the long medieval night. That historical Humanism has precise characteristics, and it is these that make us feel ourselves to be a continuation of that current—in contrast to the hollow claims of certain religious currents that today give themselves the title “Humanist,” for there can be no Humanism where any other value is placed above the human being. I should also

emphasize that Humanism derives its explanation of the world, values, society, politics, art, and history fundamentally from its conception of the human being; its understanding of the structure of the human being is what gives clarity to its focus. One cannot proceed in any other way, one cannot arrive at the human being from any starting point other than the human being. One cannot start from theories about matter, the spirit, or God—one must start from the structure of human life, its liberty and intentionality. And logically, no determinism or naturalism can transform into Humanism, because in its initial assumptions the human being is an accessory.

Today's New Humanism defines human beings as *historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature.* Here we find the elements that, duly developed, could justify a theory and a practice capable of producing an answer to the present emergency. To go further into considerations of this definition would take us far afield, and there is not enough time to do so.

It can escape no one's notice that the brief description I have given of civilization and today's crisis takes as its starting point a consideration of the *structure of human existence,* and that this description is precisely that of contemporary Humanism, applied to the present subject matter. The terms "crisis of civilization" and "Humanism" become linked when we propose a vision that can contribute to overcoming some of today's difficulties. Though we go no further in characterizing it, it should be clear that we are considering the theme of Humanism as a set of ideas, a practical project, a current of opinion, and a possible organization that can carry forward the objective of both social and personal transformation, embracing and including concrete and distinct political and cultural particularities, without these particularities disappearing as forces for change—particularities that are diverse and yet convergent in their ultimate intentions. In this moment of change, of decentralization and clamor for the recognition of what are real particularities, it would not be helpful for anyone to insist on the hegemony or universality of any single tendency.

I would like to end with a very personal consideration. During these days I have had the opportunity to attend meetings and seminars with cultural figures, scientists, and academics. On more than one occasion I seemed to sense a climate of pessimism when we exchanged ideas about the future that we may soon be living through. At the time I did not feel tempted to make naive pronouncements or to declare my faith in a happy future. And yet now I believe that we must make an effort to overcome this disheartenment by remembering other moments of grave crisis that the human species has lived through and overcome. In this regard, I would like to recall those words, whose sentiment I fully share, that found voice in the very beginnings of Greek tragedy: "When all roads were apparently closed, the human being has always found the way out."

Thank you very much.

A Contemporary View of Humanism

Universidad Autónoma, Madrid, April 16, 1993

I wish to thank the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid for the opportunity you have given me to express my views here, and to thank the Humanist Forum for the invitation to speak today. I also want to thank you, professors, students, members of the press, and friends. Thank you all for coming.

The last time I spoke publicly in Madrid was on November 3, 1989, in El Ateneo. On that occasion I spoke about a book of mine that had just been published here in Spain. Today we will not talk about literature or poetry, though. Instead, we will consider a current of thought called Humanism. In light of the profound social changes that are occurring, this current with its proposal of transformative action has begun to be taken seriously. I'd like to review very quickly its historical background, its development, and the situation in which it finds itself today.

The word "humanism" commonly has two meanings. In the first place, it is used to indicate any tendency of thought that affirms the value and dignity of the human being. With such a broad definition, Humanism can be interpreted in the most diverse and contrasting ways. In its other and more limited meaning, which locates Humanism within a precise historical context, the word is used to indicate the process of transformation that began in Europe between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries and that, in the sixteenth century under the name of the *Renaissance,* dominated the intellectual life of Europe. Names such as Erasmus, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Nicholas of Cusa, Thomas More, Juan Vives, and Charles de Bouelles remind us of the diversity and scope of that historical, or Renaissance, Humanism. The influence of this historical Humanism continued throughout the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth centuries, leading ultimately to the revolutions that opened the doors to the modern age. Following these remarkable events, this current seems to have slowly waned, until the middle of the twentieth century when Humanism once more began to appear in debate among philosophers and thinkers concerned with the social and political issues of the day.

The basic aspects of historical Humanism were, in brief, the following:

1. It embodied a reaction against the way of life and values of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of a profound recognition of other cultures, particularly those of Greece and Rome, in art, science, and philosophy.
2. It set forth a new image of the human being that exalted the human personality and its transformative action.
3. A new attitude toward nature emerged, in which nature was accepted as the environment or setting of the human being and no longer simply as a "lower" world filled with temptations and punishments.
4. There was a new interest in experimentation and research on the surrounding world, with a tendency to seek natural explanations for things without the need for reference to the supernatural.

These four aspects of historical, or Renaissance, Humanism converged toward a single objective: to build faith in the human being and human creativity, and in viewing the world as the kingdom of humanity, which the human being will master through a knowledge of the sciences.

From this new perspective arose the need to construct a new vision of the universe and of history. In the same way, the new ideas and approaches of this humanist movement led people to reformulate the religious question in terms of its dogmatic and liturgical structures as well as its organizational structures, which had permeated the social organization of the Middle Ages. Humanism, in correlation with the changing economic and social forces of the time, represented a spirit of revolution that was becoming increasingly conscious and increasingly oriented toward questioning the established order. But the Reformation in the German and Anglo-Saxon worlds and the Counter Reformation in the Latin world attempted to hold back these new ideas, in order to reimpose, in an authoritarian fashion, the traditional Christian world-view. This crisis then moved from the Church into the structures of the state. And ultimately, empire and monarchy by divine right were eliminated as a result of the revolutions that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century.

Following the French Revolution and the wars of independence in the Americas, however, Humanism virtually disappeared, though it left an underlying social foundation of ideals and aspirations that continues to feed economic, political, and scientific transformations. Humanism was pushed back by concepts and practices that took hold with the end of colonialism, the Second World War, and the bipolar alignment of the world between the two superpowers. It is in this situation that concerned men and women have reopened the debate on the meaning of the human being and of nature, on the justification of economic and political structures, on the orientation of science and technology, and in general on the direction of historical events.

It was the philosophers of existence who gave the first signs of this new round of questioning: Heidegger, in his “Letter on Humanism,” dismissed Humanism as just another metaphysic; Sartre defended it in his lecture *Existentialism* (*L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*); and Luijpen, in his *Phenomenology and Humanism,* attempted to give it a more precise theoretical framework. On the other side were noteworthy efforts by such authors as Althusser, who, in *For Marx,* maintained a clearly anti-humanist stance and Maritain, who, in *Integral Humanism,* attempted the appropriation of Humanism by its antithesis in Christianity.

After the long road it has traveled, and in light of these more recent debates in the field of ideas, it is clear that Humanism needs to define its contemporary position, not simply as a theoretical concept but also in terms of action and social practice. With this in mind, we will rely on the recent foundational document, the “Statement of the Humanist Movement.”

Today, any discussion of the status of the question of Humanism must be approached taking into account the conditions in which the human being lives. These conditions are not abstract, and consequently it is not legitimate to derive Humanism from some theory of nature, a theory of history, or from a faith in God. The human condition is such that the immediate encounter with pain and the need to overcome it are inevitable. This condition, common to so many other species, finds in the human being the additional need of seeing how, in the future, pain may be overcome and pleasure achieved. This foresight is based on both past experience and the intention to improve the current situation. Human labor, accumulated in social productions, is passed down and transformed from generation to generation in the continuing struggle to overcome the natural and social conditions in which the human being lives. It is because of all this that Humanism defines the human being as a *historical* being whose mode of social action is capable of transforming both the world and the human being’s own nature. This point is of capital importance, because if we accept it we cannot later coherently affirm some natural law, or natural property, or natural institutions, or lastly a future human being that is the

same as that of today, implying that the development of the human being has been completed once and for all.

Today, the old question concerning the relationship between “man and nature” takes on new importance. In revisiting this question, we discover that great paradox in which the human being has no permanent character, no nature, while at the same time we observe in the human being one great constant: historicity. That is why, stretching the terms a bit, we can say that *the nature of human beings is their history, their social history.* Consequently, each human being who is born is not the same as the first member of its species, not simply genetically equipped to respond to its environment; each human being is, rather, a *historical* being, unfolding his or her personal experience in a social landscape, in a *human* landscape. And it is here, in this social world, that the common human intention to overcome pain is negated by the intention of other human beings. We are saying that there are those who, in negating the intentions of others, *naturalize* them, converting them into objects to be used.

Thus, the tragedy of being subject to natural physical conditions gives impetus to social labor as well as to science (whose new insights overcome those conditions), while the tragedy of being subjected to social conditions of inequality and injustice impels the human being to rebel against such situations, in which we observe not the interplay of blind forces but rather the operation of other human intentions. And challenging such intentions—those that discriminate and divide people from one another—takes place in a sphere that is far different from that of natural tragedy, in which there is no intention. That is why in all discrimination there is always a monstrous effort to establish that the differences between human beings are given by nature, whether physical or social, and that the interplay of those natural forces takes place without the intervention of human intention. That is, there are some who try to establish racial, sexual, and economic differences based on supposed genetic or market laws, but in all those cases we see distortion, hypocrisy, and bad faith at work.

These two basic ideas that we have discussed—first, the human condition as subject to pain, and the impulse to overcome it; and, second, the definition of the human being as a social and historical being—frame the state of the question for today’s humanists. For a fuller treatment of these subjects, I refer you to the work *Contributions to Thought* and the essay “Historiological Discussions.”

The “Statement of the Humanist Movement,” the foundational document of the Humanist Movement, declares that we will pass from prehistory to the true history of the human being when the violent, animal appropriation of some human beings by others is no more. In the meantime, we cannot start from any central value other than that of the human being, fully realized and fully free. The affirmation “nothing above the human being and no human being below any other” is a synthetic way of expressing this core idea. If one places as the central value God, the State, Money, or any other entity, one necessarily subordinates the human being, and thus creates conditions for the subsequent control or sacrifice of human beings. Humanists are very clear on this point, and while Humanists include both atheists and believers, we do not start from atheism or from religion as the basis for our vision of the world and our action—we begin from the human being and from the immediate needs of the human being.

Humanists raise the fundamental issue: knowing whether we want to live, and deciding on the conditions in which we want to do so. All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, and ideological—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to Humanists, who condemn all forms of discrimination, whether overt or hidden.

That is the line we draw between Humanism and Anti-Humanism. Humanism gives priority to labor over big capital; to real democracy over formal democracy; to decentralization over centralization; to anti-discrimination over discrimination; to freedom over oppression; and to meaning in life over resignation, complicity, and the absurd.

Because Humanism upholds the belief in *freedom of choice,* it possesses a valid ethics. And because Humanism upholds the belief in human intention, it distinguishes between error and bad faith.

In this way, Humanists take clear positions. We do not feel that we have sprung from nothing, but rather that we are tributaries of a long process and collective effort. We are committed to the present, and we envision a continuing struggle toward the future. We affirm diversity, in open opposition to the regimentation that until now has been imposed based on the argument that diversity sets the elements of a system in dialectic, and that respecting all particularities gives free reign to centrifugal and disintegrating forces. Humanists believe the opposite, affirming that now, during just such times as these, the leveling and obliterating of diversity will lead rigid structures to explode. For this reason, we stress a convergent direction and a convergent intention, opposing both the idea and the practice of eliminating supposedly dialectical conditions from any given group or collectivity.

In the “Statement of the Humanist Movement,” we acknowledge the antecedent of historical Humanism and draw inspiration from the contributions of many cultures, not only those that now occupy center stage. We fix our gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the present crisis. We are optimists. We believe in liberty and social progress.

As Humanists, we are internationalists—we aspire to a *universal human nation*. While understanding the world we live in as a single whole, we act in our immediate surroundings. We do not seek a uniform world but one that is multiple and diverse: diverse in ethnicity, language, and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheistic or religious; diverse in work and creativity.

Humanists do not want masters—we have no desire for authority figures or bosses, nor do we see ourselves as leaders or bosses or spokespersons for anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its stead. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

New Humanism turns directly to disputing economic conditions. It points out that today we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how whatever has survived until now will accommodate to the dictates of international financial capital, a speculative capital that is growing ever more concentrated worldwide. Thus, even the nation state depends on credit and loans in order to survive. All must beg for investment capital and provide guarantees that give banks the ultimate say in decision-making. The time is fast approaching when, just as occurred with both cities and agricultural areas, the corporations themselves will fall under the indisputable control of the banks. The time of the Parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to one another despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity through its control of the means of communication and information. Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our social resources. They are able to deplete irreplaceable natural

resources and to act with increasing disregard for the human being. And just as big capital has drained everything from businesses and the state, so has it emptied science of meaning, reducing it to technologies that produce poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

We Humanists do not overstate the case when we contend that today the world is technologically capable of rapidly resolving the problems that exist across vast regions of the planet, which involve the need to provide employment, adequate food, health care, housing, and education for all people. If this possibility is not being realized, it is simply because the monstrous speculation of big capital is preventing it. By now, big capital has already exhausted the stage of market economies in the developed countries, and in its technological conversion is beginning to discipline society to face the chaos it has itself produced. Growing unemployment, recession, and the outgrowing of traditional political and institutional frameworks mark the beginning of a new period in which the old social strata and organization of leadership are being replaced and adapted to the new times. These changes of schema, however, represent only one more step in the general crisis of today's System as it moves toward planetarization.

But in the face of this growing irrationality, it is not, as might be expected, voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition—instead, we hear the voices of the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism. And if collectivities and entire regions will increasingly be guided by this neo-irrationalism, then the margin for action by progressive forces will diminish day by day. On the other hand, millions of working people have come to realize that the centralized state is as much an unreal sham, as false, as capitalist democracy is. And just as workers are standing up against corrupt union leadership, more than ever citizens are now questioning traditional political parties and governments. But it will be necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise simply "spin their wheels" in nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. To take this constructive direction, it is necessary to address the central issue: the factors of production.

For Humanism, labor and capital are the principal factors of production, though speculation and usury are often present as well. Today it is essential that the absurd relationship between labor and capital be totally transformed. This relationship has until now been governed by the rule that capital receives the profits while workers receive a salary—an inequity justified on the basis of the "risk" assumed in the investment. But this does not take into account the risk that the worker bears in facing the uncertainties of unemployment and crisis.

Apart from the relationship between labor and capital, there is also in play the management and decision-making power in the business. The fact of the matter is that profits not reinvested in the company, not directed toward its expansion or diversification, are diverted toward financial speculation; profits not used for creating sources of new jobs flow into speculation. Consequently, the just and possible struggle of workers will consist of demanding that capital be used for its maximum productive yield. But this cannot happen until management and decision-making are shared. How else will we avoid massive layoffs, closures, even the loss of entire industries? Because the greatest harm comes from underinvestment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced indebtedness, and capital flight.

And if some should persist in calling for the expropriation of the means of production on behalf of the workers, following nineteenth-century teachings, they must also bear in mind the recent failure of "Real Socialism." As for the objection that to treat capital in the same way that work is treated will only speed its flight to more profitable areas, it should be very clear that this cannot go on much longer, because the irrationality of the present scheme is leading to saturation and worldwide crisis. And that argument, apart from accepting something that is

radically immoral, ignores the historical process of the growing transfer of capital to banks, which is resulting in even the owners of businesses gradually being reduced to the status of employees of the bank, stripped of the power to make decisions within a lengthening chain of command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the process of recession continues to deepen, these employers and businesspeople themselves will increasingly come to recognize their predicament.

Humanist action cannot be limited solely to support for labor or union demands. Instead, broad political action is needed to prevent the State from being nothing more than an instrument of worldwide financial capital, to assure that the relationship among the factors of production is just, and to return to society the autonomy that has been stolen from it.

In the political field, the situation today shows to what extent the edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its cornerstones—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have eroded. The theoretical separation of powers is, in practice, seriously compromised. In every part of the world, even a cursory examination of the origin and composition of the various branches of government reveals the intimately interwoven relationships that link them together. And it could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of a single System. In nation after nation we see crises in which one branch of government gains supremacy over the others, in which functions are usurped or overlap, in which corruption and irregularities surface—all corresponding to the changing global financial and political situation of the countries.

As for representative government, with the extension of universal suffrage people came to believe that there is but a single step, a single act involved, when they elect their representative and their representative carries out the mandate of the people. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first act in which the many elect the few, and a second act in which those few betray the many by representing interests foreign or contrary to the mandate they received. This evil is nurtured within the political parties, which today are reduced to little more than a handful of leaders totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, the powerful interests finance candidates and dictate the policies that these candidates are to follow. All of this reveals a profound crisis in both the conception and implementation of representative government.

Humanists propose to transform the practice of representation, placing the greatest importance on consulting the people directly, through referenda, plebiscites, and the direct election of candidates, because in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, there are subterfuges and financial restrictions that keep candidates off the ballot—all measures that prevent the free expression of the will of the people. All laws that prevent the full ability of any citizen to elect and to be elected make a mockery of real democracy, which must be above restriction by any such laws. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, the mass media must be made fully available to the people during the time of elections, allowing candidates to explain their proposals and positions, and giving all candidates exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the populace. Furthermore, to address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, *laws of political responsibility* must be enacted, which will subject any elected officials who do not keep their campaign promises to being stripped of their legislative privileges, impeached, or expelled. The other expedient—the only one available today—under which individuals or parties who do not keep their promises risk rejection at the polls in subsequent elections, does not deter in any way that second act, the betrayal of those

represented. As for directly consulting the people on urgent issues, every day there are greater technological possibilities for implementing this idea. That does not mean simply giving greater priority to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys—what it does mean is making real participation in government easier and implementing direct voting through today's advancing electronic and computer technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must have the guarantees to which their right to true representation entitles them. In addition, all measures must be taken to foster, in practice, their full inclusion, participation, and development. Today, minorities the world over, increasingly the targets of xenophobia and discrimination, cry out in anguish for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, raising it to the level of the most important debates of our time, and everywhere leading the struggle until all such neo-fascisms, whether overt or hidden, are overcome. In short, to fight for the rights of minorities is to fight for the rights of all human beings. But today it also happens that in the supposed melting pot of a country—under the coercion of a centralized state, today little more than an unfeeling instrument in the hands of big capital—entire provinces, regions, or autonomies suffer the same discrimination as do minorities. And this will come to an end when people support federative forms of organization in which real political power is returned to the hands of those existing historical and cultural entities.

In summary, to bring to the fore the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and the decentralization of the state apparatus, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new type of society, a flexible society in constant change, in keeping with the dynamic needs of the peoples of the world—now suffocated more each day by their dependency on an inhuman system.

In today's confused situation, it is important to discuss the issue of spontaneous or naive humanism and to see it in relation to what we understand as *conscious Humanism.* We can observe that humanist ideals and aspirations in general are awakening in our societies with a vigor that was unknown only a few years ago. The world is changing at great speed, and this change, aside from sweeping away old structures and old references, is obliterating the old forms of struggle. In such a situation, spontaneous phenomena of all types arise, and they bear a closer resemblance to catharsis and social unrest than to processes with real direction. That is why, when we consider progressive groups, associations, and individuals to be broadly humanist, even though they do not participate in this Humanist Movement, we are stressing and supporting a union of forces all tending in the same direction—not some new hegemony that is simply a continuation of old, worn-out approaches and procedures that seek to impose uniformity.

We believe that it is in the workplaces and in the homes and in the neighborhoods of working people that simple protests will grow into a conscious force oriented toward the transformation of the economic structures. And there are many other activities that bring together combative members of union and political organizations. Humanism does not at all suggest that these members should resign from their organizations in order to join our Movement, but quite the contrary. The struggle to transform their leadership, to cause them to direct their efforts beyond simple, short-term issues, will set those progressive elements on a course of convergence with Humanist proposals. And the great numbers of students and teachers who are already sensitive to injustice will also become more aware of their will to change, especially as the general crisis touches them directly. And surely, members of the press, in such close contact with the daily tragedies of our times, are now more able to act in a

humanist direction, as are sectors of the intelligentsia whose productions dispute the rules of this inhuman system. In addition, there are many approaches that base their action on combating human suffering, inviting other like-minded men and women to join them in disinterested action on behalf of the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. A wide array of associations, volunteer groups, and important sectors of the population mobilize from time to time and make positive contributions. Certainly, one of their contributions lies in exposing these problems and in generating greater awareness of them. However, these groups do not define or plan their actions in terms of transforming the social and economic structures that give rise to these wrongs. These positions might better be referred to as Humanitarianism than conscious Humanism *per se,* although there are in them valid protests and specific, focused actions that can be deepened and extended.

Just as there exists a broad and diffusely defined sector of society that we might call the "humanist camp," the sector that might be called the "anti-humanist camp" is no less widespread. Unfortunately, today there are millions of humanists who have yet to begin moving in a clear direction of transformation, while at the same time we see regressive phenomena reappearing that everyone had thought were long since overcome. In the measure that the forces that orchestrate big capital continue to asphyxiate the peoples of the Earth, incoherent positions arise and gain strength by exploiting that discontent, channeling it toward various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascisms lies a profound negation of human values. Similarly, in certain aberrant environmentalist factions, nature is set in first place, above humanity. No longer do they preach that environmental disaster is a disaster because it endangers humankind—instead, to them, the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature. According to such approaches, the human being is somehow contaminated and therefore contaminates nature. It would be better, they argue, had medicine not been successful in combating disease and prolonging human life. "Earth first," they cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from that position to discrimination against cultures seen to "pollute" or against "impure" foreigners who "dirty our cities." Such movements should be considered anti-humanist, because at bottom they abhor the human being. And their mentors display this self-contempt, reflecting the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so in vogue today.

On the other hand, there is a significant sector of society made up of perceptive people who join environmental movements because they understand the gravity of the problems that environmentalism uncovers and denounces. And if that environmentalism can take on the humanist character that befits it, it will direct the struggle against the specific entities that are actually producing the catastrophe: big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely linked to the military-industrial complex. Before worrying about seals, we must face the problems of hunger, overpopulation, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal housing and sanitation in a great many parts of the world. And we must focus on the growing unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in the developed world—a world that, while technologically advanced, is generating serious environmental imbalances in the name of its own irrational growth.

It is not necessary for us to dwell at any length on the role played by the Right in its many forms as political instruments of Anti-Humanism. In the right wing, bad faith reaches such heights that periodically some even proclaim themselves spokespersons for "Humanism." So shameless is their bad faith and semantic banditry that these representatives of Anti-Humanism attempt to cloak themselves in the name "Humanist." It would be impossible to inventory the full range of resources, instruments, tools, forms, and expressions that Anti-Humanism has at its

disposal, but having shed light on some of its more deceptive practices should help naive or “spontaneous” humanists in rethinking their ideas and the meaning of their social practice.

As for the organization of the Humanist Movement, it supports and mobilizes action fronts in the fields of labor, housing, unions, politics, and culture, with the intention of becoming an increasingly broad-based movement. By proceeding in this way, it creates conditions of inclusion so that a wide range of progressive forces, groups, and individuals can participate and work together, without losing their own identities or particular characteristics. The objective of such collective action is to promote a union of forces that will thus be capable of influencing ever larger sectors of the population, and through these actions provide orientation and direction for the transformation of society.

We Humanists are not naive, nor do we praise ourselves with empty words. In this sense, we do not consider our proposals to be the most advanced expression of social consciousness, nor do we think of our organization in unquestioning terms. And we do not pretend to represent or speak for the majority. What we do is simply to act in accordance with our best judgment as we strive for the transformations we believe to be most suitable and possible for these times in which we live.

To conclude this talk, I would like to communicate to you a personal concern of mine. I do not at all believe that we are moving toward a dehumanized world, like that presented by some science fiction writers, some salvationist movements, or some pessimistic currents. I do believe that we are standing at exactly the point—as has occurred time and again in human history—when we must choose between two roads that lead to opposite worlds. We must choose in what conditions we want to live, and I believe that at this perilous moment humanity is poised to make its choice. Humanism has an important role to play in support of the better of these two options.

Thank you very much.

The Conditions of Dialogue

Academy of Sciences, Moscow, October 6, 1993

Honorable Vice President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Vladimir Kudriatsev, respected professors, and friends:

The distinction conferred upon me by the Russian Academy of Sciences at the session of the Scientific Council of the Latin American Institute on September 21 is of the greatest importance to me. Only a few days after receiving the news, I find myself here with you to express my gratitude for this recognition and to reflect upon the dialogue I have been holding over the course of several years with academics from a number of institutes in your country. This exchange, which we have carried out through personal contact, correspondence, and books, has demonstrated clearly the possibility of establishing a certain foundation of shared ideas, provided, as in this case, that the dialogue is rigorous and free of prejudices. In contrast, I would like to speak today about certain difficulties that can obstruct the free flow of dialogue in general and not infrequently lead it down blind alleys.

I have used the word “dialogue” almost in the Greek sense of *dialogos* and the later *dialogus,* which expresses the same idea and always implies an alternating conversation between people who express their ideas or emotions. But a dialogue, even when it meets the formal requirements, sometimes doesn’t work, and the interlocutors will fail to reach a full understanding of the subject under discussion. The philosophical and scientific form of thinking, unlike the dogmatic form, is essentially dialogic, and it bears a close relationship to that dialectic structure presented to us by Plato as an instrument for approaching truth. Contemporary scholars have once again begun reflecting on the nature of dialogue, especially since the introduction of Phenomenology and the formulation of the “problem of the Other,” whose most illustrious representative is Martin Buber. Collingwood had already made clear that a problem cannot be solved if it is not understood, and that it cannot be understood if the class of question it poses is not known. Question and answer take place within the hermeneutic dialogue, but no answer closes the circle—it only opens the circle to new questions that in turn require reformulation.

The thesis that I will defend today can be stated in the following way: *There can be no complete dialogue without a consideration of the pre-dialogic elements on which the need for the dialogue is based.* To illustrate this statement, let me use some everyday examples that involve me personally.

It sometimes happens that when I am asked to explain my thought in a lecture, a text, or a statement for the press, I have the sensation that both the words I use and the thread of my discourse are such that they can be understood without difficulty, and yet they do not “connect” with these listeners, readers, or members of the press. And these people are not in any worse condition to understand than many others with whom my discourse *does* connect. Naturally I am not talking about those disagreements that can arise regarding the proposals I formulate and the objections the other party may make—indeed, it seems that in that case there is a perfectly good connection. I have noted that kind of connection even in the midst of heated argument. No, I am talking about something more general, something that has to do with the *conditions* of

dialogue itself (which would include this exposition—understanding it as a dialogue with another who accepts, or rejects, or doubts, my assertions). I have this sensation of non-connection most strongly when I can see that what I've explained has been understood, and yet the person goes on to ask the same question again and again, or focuses upon points unrelated to what has been said. It's as though a certain vagueness, a certain lack of interest, accompanied their understanding of what I've said; as though their interest lay beyond (or closer at hand) than what has been expressed.

Here we are taking *dialogue* to be a relationship of reflection or discussion between people, between parties. Without being overly rigorous, we might clarify certain conditions that are necessary if that relationship of dialogue is to exist or an explanation is to be reasonably followed. Accordingly, for a dialogue to be coherent both parties must: (1) agree on the *theme* to be discussed; (2) accord the theme a *similar degree of importance;* and (3) possess a *common definition* of the important terms to be used.

When we say that the parties need to agree on the theme of the dialogue, we are referring to a relationship in which each person takes into consideration the discourse of the other person. We should note that to define the subject does not mean that it cannot undergo some change over the course of the discussion, but in all cases each party must know at least minimally what it is that the other person is speaking about.

The next condition tells us that the parties must give the theme a similar weight or degree of importance. We are not necessarily talking about an exact congruence, but simply a similar quantification of the importance each places on the subject, because if one party holds that the subject is of primary importance, whereas for the other party it is trivial, then there may be agreement about the object under discussion, but not about the interest in or function of the discourse as a whole.

Finally, if the key terms of the discussion have different definitions for the two parties, this can have the result that the object of the dialogue, and even the subject dealt with, will be distorted.

If these three conditions are satisfied, then it is possible to advance and for the parties to be in reasonable agreement or disagreement with the sequence of arguments that are being expressed. But there are many factors that can hinder these conditions of dialogue from being met. I will limit myself to looking only at some of the pre-dialogical factors that affect the importance conferred on a given subject.

In order for a statement to exist, there must be a prior intention that allows the person to choose the terms and the relationship between them. It is not enough to say "no man is immortal" or "all rabbits are herbivorous" for the other person to understand what subject it is that I wish to consider. The intention that precedes the discourse sets the ambit, the universe, in which the propositions will be stated. And that universe is not genetically logical, it involves structures that are pre-logical, pre-dialogical. And the same applies to the person receiving the statement. The universe of discourse must coincide both for the person speaking and the recipient of that speech. Otherwise, we would say there was a non-coincidence in the discourse.

Until quite recently people thought that the conclusion derives from the interaction of the premises. And so one would say: "All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal." And it was assumed that the conclusion derived from the foregoing terms, when in reality the person organizing these statements already had the conclusion in mind. There was, then, an intention launched toward a certain result, and that intention in turn allowed the person to choose his or her statements and terms. This is what occurs not only in everyday

discussions, but even in science the discourse goes in the direction of an objective previously formulated as a hypothesis. In this way, when a dialogue is established, each party may have a different intention, aim for a different objective, and may even place a different overall level of importance on the subject. But that "importance" is not given by or in the theme itself—it is given by a whole set of prior beliefs, valuations, and interests that each party brings to the discussion.

For example, in taking "meaning in life" as the subject of their dialogue, two people might agree in the abstract that this is a theme of the greatest importance, and yet one of the parties might be convinced that treating this subject is of little use, that it will solve nothing, and that, lastly, it has no practical importance for daily life. That this skeptical interlocutor may nevertheless follow the arguments of the other party, or participate actively in the dialogue, is explained by other factors, but not by the subject itself, whose substantiality the first party has rejected from the outset. In this way, the pre-dialogic elements set not only the universe of the subject but also include the *intentions* of the parties, which in this case lay beyond (or this side of) the topic.

Of course, these pre-dialogical elements are also pre-*logical,* and act within the horizons of the era and of the society, even though individuals often mistake these simply as products of their own personal experiences and observations. And this creates a barrier that cannot easily be overcome until the sensibility of the age—that is, the historical moment in which we live—has changed. It is precisely for this reason that many contributions in the field of science and other areas of human activity have become accepted as being completely obvious and true only later on. But until we have arrived at that "later on," those who offer these ideas and activities find themselves in a dialogic vacuum, and not infrequently facing a wall of hostility raised even at the possibility of their publicly discussing these new points of view. Once the initial turbulence has passed, and one or perhaps several new generations have made their way onto the stage of history, the importance of those contributions that were "ahead of their time" comes to be recognized by everyone, and people are surprised that those contributions were ever rejected, their importance ever denied or minimized.

Thus, when I express my thought (which does not coincide with certain beliefs, valuations, and interests belonging to the universe of the present age), I understand the disconnection that I encounter with many of my interlocutors, even those who in the abstract would appear to be in perfect agreement with me. In my work of disseminating Humanism I encounter these difficulties with some frequency. Even when one explains the ideas of New Humanism and does so clearly, that alone may not result in a satisfactory connection with many interlocutors, because there are still hindrances in the form of beliefs from prior stages that lead some listeners to place greater importance on questions or factors other than the human being. Of course, many people will say that they are "humanist," because the word "humanism" can be simply ornamental, while it is clear that such people do not have any genuine interest in understanding the message or proposals of this current of thought and this social practice.

If one considers that any organization of ideas into a system is an ideology, and current fashion dictates "the end of ideologies," then it is clear that systematic formulations of Humanism will tend not to be taken seriously. Instead, in a contradictory way, the preference will be for instant, piecemeal answers to problems that are global and general, and any systematic answers will seem to be overly broad generalizations. Although it happens, in this age of planetarization, that the fundamental problems we are living through are structural and global, people do not easily grasp this; therefore, we find ourselves facing an agglomeration of destructured answers that, by their very nature, lead only to further complications in a chain

reaction racing out of control. This occurs, of course, because the economic interests of the privileged circles manage the world, and more than that because the vision of the world of this privileged few has taken hold even in the most wronged and underprivileged sectors of society. It is pathetic to hear in the discourse of the average citizen the echo of the same chords we have heard struck only the day before in the news media by those who represent the dominant minorities. And this state of affairs will persist, and neither profound dialogue nor concerted global action will be possible until the final failure of all piecemeal attempts to resolve the growing crisis that has been unleashed in the world.

At present, people still believe that today's prevailing global economic and political system should not be challenged, thinking it is something that can be perfected. We believe, quite the contrary, that today's system is not perfectible, that it is not something that can be gradually reformed, and that piecemeal, destructured solutions will not lead to reintegration or renewal. While these two opposing positions may engage in dialogue, the pre-dialogical elements that act in each position are irreconcilable, both as systems of belief and as sensibilities. Only with the continuing failure of piecemeal solutions will we come to a new horizon of questioning and conditions that are adequate for a dialogue. It is then that these new ideas will gradually be recognized and that those sectors today most bereft of hope will begin to mobilize. Today, even when some claim they will improve some aspect or other of the current system, the feeling that is becoming widespread in the populace is that things will only continue to worsen. That diffuse sensation in people is not indicative of some simple-minded apocalyptic millenarianism—it reveals a pervasive and deep-seated disquiet that, born as a "gut feeling" in the voiceless majority, is gradually extending into all levels of society. Meanwhile, amid all this we continue to hear people reassuring us, contradictorily, that this system can be perfected in a piecemeal way.

Dialogue, a decisive factor in all human construction, cannot be reduced to the rigors of logic or linguistics. Dialogue is a living thing in which the exchange of ideas, emotions, and experiences is tinged with the irrationality of existence. This human life—with its beliefs, fears, and hopes, with its hatreds, aspirations, and ideals of the age—is what acts as the foundation for all dialogue. When I said that *there can be no complete dialogue without a consideration of the pre-dialogic elements on which the need for the dialogue is based,* I was referring to the practical consequences of this formulation. We will see no full dialogue on the fundamental questions of today's civilization until we, as a society, begin to lose our belief in the innumerable illusions fed by the enticements of the current system. In the meantime, the dialogue will continue to be insubstantial and without any connection to the profound motivations of society.

When the Academy notified me of the distinction it had conferred on me, I realized that in some latitudes of the world something new has begun to move, something that, beginning in a dialogue of specialists, will slowly begin to move into the public square.

I wish to express my gratitude to this great institution, to all of you, and my fervent wish that a fruitful dialogue will deepen and spread beyond the cloisters of academe into the world at large.

Humanist Forum

Moscow, October 7, 1993

My friends, it is the goal of this Humanist Forum to study and develop positions on the global problems affecting the world today. From this point of view, the Forum is a cultural organization in the broadest sense, concerned with developing structural relationships among the phenomena of science, politics, art, and religion. The Humanist Forum considers freedom of conscience and freedom from ideological prejudice to be the indispensable conditions for this work of understanding the complex phenomena of the contemporary world.

In my view, the Humanist Forum—in addition to aspiring to become an instrument for information, exchange of ideas, and discussion among people and institutions from the widest possible spectrum of the world's cultures—can play a permanently active role in which all pertinent information circulates rapidly among its members.

One might ask whether today there aren't numerous institutions already in existence that—given their experience, their financial solvency, and their professional and technical resources—might not be able to carry out this work with greater success. One could think that universities and their continuing education programs, private and public foundations, and even the cultural organizations of the United Nations might be appropriate avenues for important research of this kind and for the dissemination of conclusions reached, supposing that they were of some value. While we do not disregard the possibility of collaboration and interchange with all such entities, we do require a high degree of independence, a great liberty of judgment in the formulation of questions and in establishing areas of interest, and these concerns are not so simple to address in the case of institutions that have their own dynamics and, of course, their own existing material and ideological dependence.

The Humanist Forum would like to lay the foundations for a future, worldwide dialogue. But it must not discard, *a priori,* the important contributions that have been and are being made by many diverse currents of thought and action, independent of the practical success or failure they have had. It would be of much greater interest to consider those many positions and to try to understand that, in this planet-wide civilization that is beginning to be born, a diversity of positions, value systems, and ways of life will certainly prevail in the future, despite the onslaught of those currents that wish to make all things uniform. In that sense, we aspire to a *universal human nation,* which we recognize as possible only if diversity exists. No central hegemony that dominates the peripheries, no lifestyle, no system of values, no ideological or religious agenda imposed at the cost of the abolition or disappearance of other forms of thought and being, will be able to sustain itself. Today we can see clearly that centralization tends to generate secessionist responses, because it does not respect the true integrity of peoples and regions that might be able to come together perfectly well within a real federation of collectivities. Nor should we think that economic control somehow works miracles. Or are there still people who believe that if they are going to grant loans for development, this entitles them to dictate changes first of the State, next of the legislature, and then of the mode of production, and later on changes concerning customs and social habits, and finally changes regarding dress, food, religion, and even thought?

Even as this naive absolutism meets with greater and greater difficulties in its attempts to impose itself, it is, as in the case of the secessionist movements noted earlier, contributing to a hardening and radicalizing of positions in all fields. If through the dictatorship of money we could in fact arrive at a fully realized society, it would be worth discussing the subject a little more. If, however, it is necessary, on top of everything else, to accept conditions that lead to regression in human development, the result will be only an increase in disorder and general misfortune.

The Humanist Forum must not lose sight of the principle of diversity or study other cultures from the standpoint of a zoological primitivism that declares one's own culture to be the zenith of an evolution that must be imitated by others. But while it is far more important to recognize that all cultures make their contributions to the great edifice of humanity, the Humanist Forum does need to establish some minimum conditions. The first is that it does not admit the participation of those who foster discrimination or intolerance. The second is that it does not allow the participation of those who foster violence as a methodology of action for imposing their concepts or ideals, no matter how elevated these concepts and ideals may be. Beyond these, there is no need for any other restrictions.

The Humanist Forum is internationalist, but does that mean that because of its ecumenicism it must reject the regional, the local? How can we reproach someone because they love their people, their homeland, their customs, their traditions? Should we really simply label such people with the epithet "nationalist" so that we can then dismiss them? To love one's roots is also to be generous in valuing the work and the suffering of the generations who have come before. That "nationalism" only becomes distorted when the affirmation of one's own nation or people is made at the expense of, or discriminating against, other collectivities, other peoples. What right would this Forum have to disparage the contributions of those who identify, for example, with socialism, with the ideal of creating a society that is egalitarian and just? What would the Forum be rejecting but one of the many possible models in which that ideal has been distorted through a tyrannically imposed uniformity. Why would this Forum ignore that liberal who considers his economic model an instrument for the well-being of all, and not just of the few? On what basis would this Forum discriminate against either believers or atheists on the basis of their respective approaches? Could in good conscience the Forum assert the superiority of some customs over others? In short, I believe that the limits set by the Forum should be the two and only the two mentioned above: the rejection of discrimination and intolerance, and the rejection of the methodologies of violence. In this way the Forum will be based on the inclusion, and not the exclusion, of human variety.

I do not wish to take up any more time with this speech; I would simply like to mention some issues about which all of us would like to have a clearer understanding and regarding which we need to find the best practical formulae for action. These issues are, in my view: growing racism and discrimination; the increasing intervention by putative peacekeeping entities in the internal affairs of other countries; the manipulation of human rights as a pretext for intervention; the true state of human rights in all parts of the world; the growth in unemployment worldwide; the increase of poverty in many places and various sectors, even in wealthy societies; the progressive deterioration of health care and education; the activities of secessionist forces; the increase in drug addiction; the increase in suicide; religious persecution and the radicalization of religious groups; the psychosocial phenomena of alteration and violence; and the real threats of environmental destruction, duly prioritized. We would also like to have a clear picture of the phenomenon of *destructuring* that, beginning in larger social and political entities, ends up

affecting everything, even down to the level of interpersonal relationships, the articulation of culture, and every project of common action among human groups.

In closing, I would like to point out, for those of you who will be putting together the various working groups, that the functioning of this Forum will not require a complex organization—rather, what is key is some mechanism that will allow ongoing contact and circulation of information. Nor will it need large resources in order to function, and the problem of funding will not be decisive for a group of this kind. It should have some sort of periodical, more in the style of a bulletin than a formal journal. It will need to find ways to make connections among people and institutions who could work together but may be hindered by distance. And finally, it will need to have an active corps of translators. Perhaps one committee of the Forum could be made up of the World Center for Humanist Studies, which will give some permanence to all these activities and, establishing priorities, maintain a schedule of the tasks being carried out.

I would like to extend a fraternal salute to the members of this Forum, and to express my best wishes to all of you for the work that is beginning today.

What Do We Understand Universalist Humanism to Mean Today?

Community Emanu-El, Headquarters of Liberal Judaism in Argentina, Buenos Aires, November 24, 1994

I wish to express my thanks to the Emanu-El community and to Rabbi Sergio Bergman for the invitation to speak here today. I would also like to thank those who are here today, the members of the community, the other speakers in this series, and also the friends of humanism who are present.

The title of this talk affirms the existence of a *universal humanism,* but, of course, this affirmation needs to be proven. To do that, we will first have to examine what we understand by the word "humanism," given that there is no general consensus on the meaning of this word. Second, we will have to discuss whether humanism belongs to a single region or place, a single culture, or whether instead it lies at the roots and is the heritage of all humanity. But before beginning, we should make explicit our interest with regard to these issues, since if we failed to do so it might be thought that we were motivated simply by historical curiosity or by some desire to pursue cultural trivia. For us, humanism has the compelling merit of being not only history but also the project of a future world and a tool of action for today.

We seek a humanism that contributes to the improvement of life, that makes common cause with those who stand up against discrimination, fanaticism, exploitation, and violence. In a world that is rapidly globalizing—and throwing diverse peoples together as it shrinks ever smaller—we see growing symptoms of the resulting clash between cultures, ethnic groups, and regions. Such a world needs a *universalist humanism*—a humanism that is both plural and convergent, diverse and unifying. A world in which countries, institutions, and human relationships are becoming destructured must have a humanism capable of impelling a rebuilding of social forces. A world in which the meaning and direction of life have been lost needs a humanism capable of creating a new atmosphere of reflection, in which the personal is no longer unrelentingly at odds with the social, nor the social with the personal. We seek a humanism that is creative, not repetitive—a *new humanism* that will encompass the paradoxes of the age while aspiring to resolve them. These ideas, in some cases apparently contradictory, will emerge in more detail as I go on.

In asking "What do we understand by *humanism* today?" I want to address both the origins of humanism as well as its current state. Let's start with humanism as it is historically recognized in the West, while leaving the door open to what has taken place in other parts of the world where a *humanist attitude* was present well before the coining of such words as "humanism," "humanist," and similar terms. That humanist attitude, which is a position common to humanists of all cultures, has the following characteristics: (1) placing the human being as the central value and concern; (2) affirming the equality of all human beings; (3) recognizing personal and cultural diversity; (4) tending to develop new knowledge beyond what is accepted as absolute truth; (5) affirming the freedom of ideas and beliefs; and (6) repudiating violence.

As we look more deeply into European culture, particularly that of pre-Renaissance Italy, we note that the phrase *studia humanitatis* (the study of the humanities) referred to a knowledge of

Greek and Latin, with special emphasis on the “classical” authors. The “humanities” were comprised of history, poetry, rhetoric, grammar, literature, and moral philosophy. These disciplines dealt with generically human questions, in contrast to the subjects studied by “jurists,” “canonists,” “legists,” and “artists,” which were meant as specifically professional training. Of course, elements from the humanities formed part of the subject matter in these fields, but were aimed more at practical applications appropriate to their respective occupations. As time went on, the difference between the “humanists” and the “professionals” grew more pronounced, as the former stressed classical studies, the investigation of other cultures, and an interest in things human—in everything that had to do with the human being. This tendency continued to such a degree that it finally made inroads into fields quite distant from those that up until that point had been considered the “humanities,” leading eventually to the great cultural revolution of the Renaissance.

In fact, the humanist attitude had begun to develop long before this, and we can see signs of this in the themes sounded by the Goliard poets and the *êcoles* of the French cathedrals in the twelfth century. But the Italian word *humanista,* which designated a certain type of scholar, did not come into use until 1538. On this point I refer you to an article by Augusto Campana titled “The Origin of the Word ‘Humanist,’” published in 1946. My point is simply that the first humanists would not have recognized themselves by that name, which came into being only much later. And here, according to studies of Walter Rüegg, one would also have to include such related words as *humanistische* (humanistic), which began to be used in 1784, and *humanismus* (humanism), which began to spread with the work of Niethammer in 1808. It was not until about the middle of the nineteenth century, in fact, that the word “humanism” began to form a part of almost every European language. We are speaking, then, about recent words and recent interpretations of phenomena that were no doubt experienced very differently at the time from the ways they have been interpreted by historiography and the cultural histories of the nineteenth century. This point is not, in my view, trivial, and I would like to come back to it again in a few moments when we consider the traditional meanings of the word “humanism.”

If I may be permitted a digression, I might point out that at present we still find that same historical substratum and still encounter those differences between the studies in the humanities that are imparted in institutions and colleges and the simple attitude that people may exhibit, defined not by their particular profession or academic specialty but rather by their stance with respect to the human being as the central concern. When people define themselves as humanists today, they tend not to do so on the basis of their studies—in much the same way as students or scholars in the humanities do not necessarily consider themselves humanists. The humanist *attitude* is vaguely understood as something broader, almost all-encompassing, and generally extending beyond the confines of academic specialties.

In Western academe, the term “humanism” often refers to that process of transformation of culture that began in Italy, particularly in Florence, at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and which, with the Renaissance, expanded throughout Europe. This current was initially linked to the *humanae litterae* (those texts that dealt with “human matters”), in contradistinction to the *divinae litterae* (those texts that stressed things divine). And that is one of the reasons that its students and scholars were called “humanists.” From this standpoint, humanism is, in its origins, a *literary* phenomenon, with a clear mission to recover the contributions of Greek and Latin culture, which had been suffocated for ten centuries by medieval Christianity. We should note that the sudden eruption of this phenomenon was not due solely to an endogenous change in economic, social, and political factors in Western society,

but also to the fact that this society was receiving transformative influences from other regions and cultures. Intense contact with the Jewish and Muslim cultures, a broadening of geographical horizons—all these formed part of a context that fostered a concern with that which is generically human (rather than narrowly Italian or even European) and with discoveries of "things human."

I believe that Salvatore Puledda is correct when, in his book *On Being Human: Interpretations of Humanism from the Renaissance to the Present,* he explains that the medieval, pre-humanist world of Europe was, from the temporal and physical points of view, a closed environment that tended to deny the importance of the contact that did in fact take place with other cultures. History, from the medieval point of view, was the history of sin and redemption. For this view, a knowledge of other cultures and civilizations that were not "illuminated by the grace of God" held no great interest. The future was simply a preparation for the Apocalypse and the judgment of God. In that Ptolemaic cosmogony, the Earth was the unmoving center of the Universe, surrounded by the spheres of the sun and the planets moving under the impulse of angelic hands, and beyond those, the sphere of the fixed stars. This system ended at the Empyrean, the throne of God, the Unmoved Mover of all. And the social organization of the Middle Ages corresponded to that vision: It was a hierarchical, hereditary structure that kept nobles rigidly separated from serfs. At the apex of this pyramid stood the Pope and the Emperor, sometimes allied, sometimes locked in struggle for hierarchical preeminence. The medieval economy, at least until the eleventh century, was a closed system based on the consumption of products at the place of their production. Money circulated only in the most limited way. Trade was slow and difficult. Europe was a continental power, cut off from much of the world because the sea lanes lay in the hands of the Byzantines and Arabs. But the journeys of Marco Polo and his contact with the cultures and technologies of the Far East; the centers of learning in Spain, from which Jewish, Arab, and Christian teachers spread new knowledge; the search for new trade routes that would avoid the barrier posed by the warring Byzantine and Muslim fleets; the formation of an increasingly active merchant class; the growth of a more powerful bourgeoisie; and the development of more efficient political institutions such as the Italian *seignories*—all these phenomena produced a profound change in the social atmosphere, and that change allowed the development of the *humanist attitude.* Nor should we forget that this development was marked by many advances and retreats, only after which it finally became a truly *conscious* attitude.

Just one century after Petrarch (1304–1374), knowledge of the classics was ten times greater than it had been throughout the entire intervening thousand years. Petrarch pored over the ancient codices for knowledge, trying to correct a distorted cultural memory, and in doing so he initiated a tendency toward reconstructing the past and brought forth a new perspective that recognized the flow of history—a perspective long blocked by the immobilism of the Middle Ages. Another of the early humanists, Gianozzo Manetti, in his 1452 work *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (*"On the Dignity of Man"*), reaffirmed the worth of the human being against the attitude of *contemptu mundi,* contempt for the world, preached by the monk Lothar of Segni, later Pope Innocent III. In a subsequent work, *De voluptate* (*"On Pleasure"*), Lorenzo Valla attacked the ethical concept of pain that prevailed in his time. And so, as economic change took place and the social structures were transformed, humanists continued to make this process an increasingly conscious one, generating an avalanche of productions that further shaped and defined this current that was already extending beyond the ambit of "the cultural" and was soon to call into question the very structures of power of the age: the Church and the monarchy.

Many specialists have noted that a new image of the human being and personality had already appeared in pre-Renaissance humanism. This human personality or existence was constructed and expressed by means of action, and it is in this respect that special importance is given to the Will over speculative intelligence. In addition, there emerged a new attitude toward nature. Nature was no longer simply God's creation, a vale of tears for mortals, but rather the setting and environment for the human being and, in some cases, the seat and body of God. And lastly, this new stance vis-à-vis the physical universe supported and strengthened the study of the material world in its various aspects, and it led to explanations of that world in terms of a set of immanent forces that could be understood without recourse to theological concepts. This shows that there was already a clear tendency toward experimentation and a drive to master natural laws. The world was now the "kingdom of man," and the human being was to master it through a knowledge of the sciences.

It was within this general framework that nineteenth-century scholars gave the name "humanist" to more than just the many literary figures of the Renaissance. Side by side with figures like Nicholas of Cusa, Rudolph Agricola, Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus, Thomas More, Jacques Lefèvre, Charles de Bouelles, and Juan Vives were included others such as Galileo and Leonardo da Vinci.

It is well known that the influence of many of the themes and ideas first introduced by the humanists of the Renaissance continued down through the years, eventually inspiring the French *encyclopédistes* and the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. But after the French and American Revolutions there began a decline in which the humanist attitude sank out of sight once more. Critical idealism, absolute idealism, and Romanticism, which in turn inspired absolutist political philosophies, rejected the human being as the central value, converting humankind into an epiphenomenon of other powers. This object-ification, this "it" instead of "you" or "thou," as Martin Buber astutely put it, became the reigning view of the human being throughout the planet. But the tragedies of the two world wars shook our societies to their very foundations, and there arose once more in the face of the Absurd a questioning of the meaning of human life. This can be seen clearly in the so-called "philosophies of existence." I will return to the contemporary state of humanism toward the end of my talk, but for the moment I would like to point out several fundamental aspects of humanism, among which we find its opposition to all forms of discrimination and its tendency toward universality.

The theme of mutual tolerance and the resulting convergence to which it can lead is very dear to humanism, and so I would like to place before you once more the explanation given by Dr. Bauer in his talk on November 3:

> In Muslim feudal society, and particularly in Spain, the situation of the Jews was quite distinct. There was no social marginalization worth mentioning, just as there was none to speak of for Christians. And only rarely did those tendencies that today we would call "fundamentalist" arise. The dominant religion did not identify itself with the prevailing social order to the same degree as in Christian Europe. Nor can one in any way use the term "ideological division" here, despite the fact that different religions, in parallel and with mutual tolerance, did exist. Everyone went, together, to the official schools and universities—a thing that would have been inconceivable in the Christian society of the Middle Ages. In his youth, the great Maimonides was a pupil and friend of Ibn-Rushd (known to the West as Averroës). And if later on the Jews, and Maimonides himself, suffered pressure and persecutions at the hands of the fanatics

> who had come from Africa and assumed power in Al-Andalus, these same fanatics did not spare the Arab philosopher, whom they considered equally heretical. During this time the atmosphere was such that a broad and deep humanism could and did arise on the part of both Muslims and Jews.… In Italy the situation was similar, not only under the brief empire of Islam in Sicily but afterward as well, and for a long time even under the direct rule of the Papacy. A monarch of German descent, the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, living in Sicily and himself a poet, even had the audacity to proclaim for his rule a tripartite ideological foundation: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and even, through this last, a continuity with classical Greek philosophy.

Here the quotation ends. There is no great difficulty in tracing humanism in the Jewish and Arab cultures. I will simply quote now some observations made by the Russian scholar Artur Sagadeev in a talk he gave in November 1993 in Moscow. In that talk, “Humanism in Classical Muslim Thought,” Sagadeev pointed out the following:

> The infrastructure of humanism in the Muslim world was shaped by the development of the cities and the culture of the cities. If we look at the following figures, we can judge the degree of urbanization of that world: The three largest cities of Savad—that is, southern Mesopotamia—and the two largest cities of Egypt contained almost twenty percent of the population. On the basis of the percentage of the population living in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, we can see that in the eighth and ninth centuries Mesopotamia and Egypt surpassed even many nineteenth-century Western European countries—including the Low Countries, England, Wales, and France. According to careful calculations, Baghdad at this time had 400,000 inhabitants, and the population of cities such as Al Fustat (later Cairo), Córdoba, Alexandria, Al Kufa, and Basra ranged from 100,000 to 250,000.
>
> The concentration in cities of great resources derived from trade and taxes brought about the emergence of a large class of medieval intelligentsia, a dynamism in spiritual life, and considerable accomplishment in science, literature, and art. The central focus in all of this was the human being, both as human race and as unique individual. It should be pointed out that the medieval Muslim world knew no cultural division such as that between the culture of the city and a culture opposed by its axiological orientation to the city’s inhabitants (an anti-urban culture represented in Europe by the inhabitants of the monasteries and feudal estates). In the Muslim world the bearers of theological education and the social groups that were analogous to the European feudal class lived in the cities and experienced the powerful influence of the culture formed among the wealthy urbanites of the Muslim cities.
>
> As to the axiological orientation of the wealthy inhabitants of Muslim cities, we can judge it by the reference group they aspired to imitate, which was to be the embodiment of the qualities of a distinguished, well-educated figure. This reference group was made up of the Adibs, people of broad humanitarian interests, knowledgeable, educated, and of high morals. The Adab—that is, the ensemble of qualities belonging to the Adib—entailed ideals of urbane, courtly, refined behavior and self-possession, and was an ideal that in its intellectual and moral function was synonymous with the Greek word *paideia* or the Latin word *humanitas.*
>
> The Adibs thus embodied ideals of humanism and were at the same time proponents of humanistic ideas that sometimes took the form of carefully polished

phrases such as “Man is the problem of man,” and “He who crosses our sea—for that man there is no shore that is not himself.” An insistence on the earthly destiny of the human being was characteristic of the Adibs, and it led them sometimes to a religious skepticism, even to the extent that some fashionable members of the group would flaunt their atheism.

Adab initially meant the etiquette of the Bedouins; but it took on its humanist character thanks to the fact that the Caliphate, for the first time since Alexander the Great, welcomed the existence of distinct religious groups and became a kind of crossroads between different cultural traditions. Thus, the Mediterranean was linked with the Indo-Iranian world. During the period in which medieval Muslim culture flourished, Adab involved the need to know ancient Hellenic philosophy, on the one hand, and to absorb the educational programs developed by Greek scientists, on the other. The Muslims used enormous resources to advance these proposals. Suffice it to say that, according to the calculations of specialists, in Córdoba alone there were more books than in all of Europe outside of Al-Andalus.

The transformation of the Caliphate into a center of reciprocal influences with other cultures in a mixture of various ethnic groups contributed to the formation of yet another feature of humanism: *universalism*—the idea of the unity of the human race. In reality, the formation of this idea was rooted in the fact that Muslim lands extended from the Volga River in the north to Madagascar in the south and from the Atlantic coast of Africa in the west to the Pacific coast of Asia in the east. Although with the passage of time the Muslim empire disintegrated, the small states that formed from the rubble were very much like the fragmented possessions of Alexander the Great’s successors. However, the Islamic faithful were still united by a single religion, a single common literary language, a single law, a single culture, while in their daily lives they communicated and lived with the cultural values of differing and very diverse religious groups.

The spirit of universalism reigned in scientific circles, in meetings (the *madjalis*) that drew together Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists who shared common intellectual interests and came from many corners of the Muslim world. They were united by the “ideology of friendship” that had previously united the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists, and other philosophical schools of antiquity, and later on the circle of Marsilio Ficino in the Italian Renaissance. On the theoretical plane, the principles of universalism had already been formulated within the framework of Kalam, and later became the basis of the conception of the world for both rationalist philosophers and the Sufi mystics. In the debates organized by the Mutakallimi theologians (the Teachers of Islam), in which representatives of many religions took part, it was the custom to support one’s thesis not with references to sacred texts, because these references had no basis for the representatives of other religions, but to ground it instead exclusively in human reason.

The text I have just read you from Sagadeev’s talk does not do full justice to the wealth of description he gives us of the customs, daily life, art, religious sensibility, law, and economic activity of the Muslim world during its period of humanist splendor. I would like to look now at another work, also by a Russian scholar, a specialist in the cultures of the New World. Professor Sergei Semenov, in his monograph of August, 1994, titled “Humanist Traditions and Innovations

in the Spanish-American World," takes a completely new approach to tracing the humanist attitude in the great cultures of pre-Columbian America. Here is what he says:

> When we speak of humanist tendencies in the Spanish-American world, we can analyze them above all from the standpoint of the material left us in artistic productions, the work of the masses, and the work of the trades and professions, which we see not only embodied in the monuments of the culture but also engraved in the memory of the people. There are many possibilities for applying this interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the concrete manifestations of humanism in the Spanish-American world, which is pluralistic to a high degree, exemplifying the phenomenon of cultural synthesis that has occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, on four continents. Of course, the principles in the Spanish-American world are markedly different from the traditions of the Euro-Asiatic world, but in various peoples of the Spanish-American world they approached a universal recognition of the original underlying unity of all human beings, independent of the tribe or society to which they belonged.
>
> We can see these notions of humanism in both Mesoamerica and South America in the pre-Columbian period. In Mesoamerica we find the myth of Quetzalcóatl, and in South America the legend of Viracocha—both deities who rejected human sacrifice, which was commonly practiced against prisoners of war who belonged to other tribes; such human sacrifice was prevalent in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest. But indigenous myths and legends, Spanish accounts, and material monuments of culture tell us that the cult of Quetzalcóatl, which appeared sometime between the years 800 and 900, is associated in the consciousness of the peoples of this region with a struggle against human sacrifice and the affirmation of other moral norms that condemned murder, stealing, and war.
>
> According to a number of legends, Topiltzin, the Toltec ruler of the city of Tula, who adopted the name of Quetzalcóatl and who lived in the tenth century of our era, possessed the qualities of a cultural hero. As told in these legends, he taught the inhabitants of Tula the art of goldsmithing, forbade them to engage in human and animal immolation, and permitted only flowers, bread, and fragrance to be offered as sacrifices to the gods. Topiltzin condemned murder, war, and stealing. According to legend, he had the appearance of a white man, though with dark rather than blond hair. Some say that he went away across the sea, others that he left in a burning flame that ascended into the sky, leaving the morning star as a promise of his return.
>
> This hero was said to have exhorted the peoples of Mesoamerica to the humanist way of life, the *toltecayotl,* which was adopted not only by the Toltecs but also by the neighboring peoples who inherited the Toltec tradition. This style of life was based on the principles of the brotherhood of all human beings, perfectibility, esteem and respect for labor, honesty, keeping one's word, the study of the secrets of nature, and an optimistic outlook on the world.
>
> The legends of the Mayan peoples of the same period relate the activities of the ruler or priest of the city of Chichén Itzá and founder of the city of Mayapán, a person named Kukulkán, who was the Mayan analogue of Quetzalcóatl. Another representative of the humanist tendency in Mesoamerica was the ruler of the city of Texcoco, the poet-philosopher Netzahualcóyotl, who lived from 1402 to 1472. This

> philosopher also rejected human sacrifice and preached friendship among all human beings, and he exercised a profound influence on the culture of the peoples of Mexico.
>
> In South America we can observe a similar movement at the beginning of the fifteenth century. This movement is associated with the names of Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui, who took the name Pachacutéc or "reformer," and his son Topa Inca Yupanqui, and with the expansion of the cult of the god Viracocha. As in Mesoamerica, Pachacútec, like his father Ripa Yupanqui, took the title "god" and called himself Viracocha. The moral norms by which the society of Tahuantinsuyo was officially governed were linked to his cult and to reforms instituted by Pachacutéc, who like Topiltzin had the qualities of a cultural hero.

And here I will end the quotation from this monograph, which, of course, is part of a long and substantive work.

In reading these two excerpts, I have wanted to bring to your attention examples of what we call the *humanist attitude* in regions that are far removed from each other, and also to show that we can, of course, find this attitude in distinct periods of various cultures. I say "distinct periods," because this attitude seems to advance and retreat in a pulsating way over the course of history, and many times even to disappear altogether, generally at moments preceding the collapse of a civilization. You can understand that establishing correspondences between civilizations on the basis of their humanist "moments" or periods is a vast undertaking, something of great scope.

If today ethnic and religious groups are turning within themselves in order to find a stronger identity, then what is underway is a kind of cultural or regional chauvinism that threatens to produce clashes with other ethnic groups, cultures, or religions. And yet, if all persons have a legitimate love for their own people and their own culture, then they can also understand that in their people and its roots there exists or has existed that "humanist moment" that makes them by definition universal, makes them of a kind with that "other" culture or religion or ethnic group they are facing. Thus, what we have are diversities that cannot be erased by one side or the other. These diversities are not a hindrance or a defect or something backward—rather, they constitute the very richness of humanity. The problem lies not in diversity but in how to achieve a *convergence* of all those diversities, and this is what occurs in a "humanist moment," and is what I mean when I speak of "points of convergence."

Finally, I would like to pick up the thread of my argument on the state of the humanist question at the present time. I have said that after the catastrophes of the two world wars, the philosophers of existence reopened the debate on the subject of humanism, a subject that had been thought dead and gone. But this debate took as its starting point the conceiving of humanism as a *philosophy,* when in reality it had never been a philosophical position but rather a *perspective* and an *attitude* toward life and things.

If, in this debate, the nineteenth-century description of the human being was taken for granted, then we can hardly be surprised that thinkers such as Foucault should accuse humanism of being part of that whole nineteenth-century philosophical approach. Even earlier, Heidegger had expressed his anti-humanism in his "Letter on Humanism," in which he dismissed humanism as just another "metaphysic." Perhaps the discussion was influenced by the position of Sartrean existentialism on humanism, which posed the question in philosophical terms. But viewing all this from the perspective of today, it seems to me exaggerated to accept

an *interpretation* of something as though it were *the thing itself,* and then, based simply on that interpretation, to go on to attribute certain characteristics to the thing itself.

In their works, Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, and many structuralists declared their anti-humanism, just as others defended humanism as a metaphysics or, at the least, an anthropology. In reality, however, Western historical humanism had never, in any instance, been a philosophy, even in Pico della Mirandola or Marsilio Ficino. The fact that many such philosophers manifested a *humanist attitude* in no way implies that this attitude was itself a philosophy. Furthermore, if Renaissance Humanism displayed an interest in the subjects of "moral philosophy" as it was called, that concern should be understood as part of efforts aimed at dismantling the manipulation of that field practiced by medieval Scholasticism.

From those errors in the interpretation of humanism—taking humanism to be a philosophy—one can easily arrive at any number of positions, including naturalistic positions such as those expressed in the "Humanist Manifesto" of 1933 or social-liberal positions such as those in the "Humanist Manifesto II" of 1974. In this way, authors such as Lamont have defined their humanisms as naturalist and anti-idealist, affirming an anti-supernaturalism, a radical evolutionism, the non-existence of the soul, the self-sufficiency of the human being, free will, an intraworldly ethic, the value of art, and humanitarianism. I believe that people have every right to define their particular conception in this way if they so choose, but it seems to me unwarranted to go beyond that to claim that Western historical humanism moved within these same directions. I further believe that the proliferation of various "humanisms" in recent years is perfectly legitimate, as long as those movements present themselves as particular manifestations of humanism, without claiming to stand in some absolute way for all of humanism in general. And lastly, I also believe that today humanism has reached the conditions to become a philosophy, a morality, an instrument of action, and a style of life.

Thus, the entire recent philosophical debate with a historical and, moreover, localized humanism has been wrongly posed. The debate in fact is only now beginning, and henceforth Anti-humanism will have to justify its objections in light of the positions of today's universalist New Humanism. We also need to recognize that this entire discussion has been a bit provincial, and that the idea that humanism was born at a certain time and place, was debated in a certain time and place, and some perhaps wished to export it to the world as a model of that time and place—that idea has gone on long enough. Let's concede, then, that the "copyright," the monopoly on the word "humanism" is held by a single geographical area. And we have, of course, been talking about a humanism that is Western, European, and to some degree Ciceronian. But since we have maintained that humanism was never a philosophy but rather a perspective and an *attitude* toward life, can we not then extend our investigation into other regions and recognize that this humanist attitude also manifested similarly in places other than Europe? If not—if we insist on defining historical humanism as a philosophy and, in addition, a specifically *Western* philosophy—we not only err, but we also throw up an insurmountable barrier to dialogue with the expressions of the humanist attitude that exist in all the cultures of the Earth. If I insist on this point, it is not only because of the theoretical consequences that such errors have had and still have, but also because of the their immediate practical consequences.

In historical humanism there has existed the strong belief that knowledge and the mastery of natural laws would lead to the liberation of humankind, that this knowledge existed in various cultures, and that one should learn from all of them. But today we see that knowledge, science, and technology are manipulated, and that knowledge has often served as an instrument of

domination. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have believed that religion has clouded people's minds and, paternalistically, have sought to impose freedom by attacking religions. Today, however, we are witnessing violent religious reactions that show no respect for freedom of conscience. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have viewed all cultural differences as "divergent," insisting that all customs and lifestyles be made uniform. Today we are witnessing violent reactions as some cultures attempt to impose their own values with no respect for diversity. The world has changed, and our experience has grown…

Yet today, in the face of this tragic submergence of reason, in the face of growing symptoms of the neo-irrationalism that appears to be invading us, we can still hear echoes of the primitive rationalism in which a number of generations have been educated. They seem to be saying: "We were right in wanting to do away with religions, because had we succeeded there wouldn't still be all these religious wars today! We were right in trying to wipe out diversity because, had we succeeded, today the fires of ethnic and cultural conflict wouldn't be flaring up anew."

But those rationalists have *not* managed to impose their own particular philosophical cult, or their own particular style of life, or their own particular culture—and that's what counts.

What counts more than anything is the discussion to resolve the serious conflicts developing today. How much longer will it take us to realize that there is no one culture whose intellectual or behavioral patterns are models that all of humanity must follow? I say all this because perhaps now is the time for us to reflect with some seriousness on changing the world and ourselves. Of course, it is easy to say that *other* people ought to change—the problem is that those people think the same thing, that *other* people should change. Isn't it time, then, that we began to recognize the humanity of *others,* to recognize the diversity of *you,* of *all* of us?

I believe that today, more than ever, there is an urgent need to change the world, and that such change, if it is to be positive, is indissolubly linked to personal change. After all, my life has meaning if I want to live it, and if I can choose or struggle to attain the conditions I want for my existence and for life in general. Living with this antagonism between the personal and the social has not yielded very good results—instead, we must discover whether it might not make more sense to bring these two terms—the personal and the social—into a convergent relationship. Living with this antagonism between cultures has not led us in the right direction—instead, we need to go beyond lip-service recognition of cultural diversity to reexamine the real possibility of convergence toward a *universal human nation.*

Finally, many defects have been attributed to the humanists of various times. It has been said that Machiavelli, too, was a humanist striving to understand the laws that govern power, that Galileo displayed a sort of moral weakness in the face of the barbarity of the Inquisition, that among Leonardo's inventions were numbered advanced weapons of war that he designed for the Prince. And in that vein it has been said that numerous contemporary writers, thinkers, and scientists have displayed just such weaknesses. Surely in all this there is much truth. But we must be fair in our appraisal of the facts. Einstein, for example, had nothing to do with the fabrication of the atomic bomb. His merit lies in his explanation of the photoelectric effect, from which the photoelectric cell and so many resulting industries have arisen, including video and television. But his genius stands out, above all, in the formulation of a great physical law: the theory of relativity. And Einstein showed no moral weakness in the face of the new Inquisition. Nor did Oppenheimer, who was given the Manhattan Project to construct an artifact that, as a purely deterrent weapon never to be used against human beings, would put an end to all conflict worldwide. Oppenheimer was unconscionably betrayed, and then he raised his voice, calling out

to the moral conscience of all scientists. For that he was fired, and for that he was persecuted under McCarthyism. Many moral shortcomings attributed to people who have embodied a humanist attitude in reality have nothing to do with their stance toward society or science, but rather with their behavior and attitude as human beings in facing pain and suffering. If, for his integrity and moral fortitude in facing martyrdom, the figure of Giordano Bruno is the paradigm of the classical humanist, then in contemporary times both Einstein and Oppenheimer can in the same way justly be considered true humanists. And why, outside the field of science, should we not consider Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King to be genuine humanists? Was Schweitzer not a humanist?

I am certain that millions of people the world over embody a humanist attitude toward life, but here I cite only a few well-known figures, because they constitute models of the humanist position who are recognized by everyone. I realize that in these individuals some might be able to object to a certain behavior, or to a certain way of doing things, or to their timing, or to their tact, but what we cannot deny is their commitment to other human beings. In any case, I am not one to pontificate on who is or is not a humanist—I wish only to give my opinion, with all the limitations that apply, about Humanism. But if someone should insist that I define the *humanist attitude* in today's world, I would simply reply, in few a words, that *any person who struggles against discrimination and violence, creating new alternatives that make liberty and freedom of choice a reality for all human beings—that person is a humanist.*

Thank you very much.

The Theme of God: Seminar on Philosophical-Religious Dialogue

Power and Light Workers Union Hall, Buenos Aires
Argentina, October 29, 1995

I will try, in the twenty minutes I've been given, to communicate my point of view on the first of the topics suggested by the organizers of this event, which is "the theme of God."

The theme of God can be addressed in various ways. I will choose the historical and cultural ambit, not because of any personal affinity, but out of consideration for the implicit framework established for this seminar. This framing includes other topics such as "the religious sentiment in the contemporary world" and "overcoming personal and social violence." The object of my presentation will be, accordingly, "the theme of God," and not "God."

Why should we be concerned with the theme of God? What interest can this subject hold for us, men and women almost of the twenty-first century? Did not Nietzsche's pronouncement "God is dead" put an end to the matter once and for all? Clearly, this question was not put to rest by that simple philosophical decree. And it has not been put to rest for two important reasons: first, because the significance of this theme has not been fully understood and, second, because placed in historical perspective we see that this issue, until only recently considered *passé,* is once again inspiring new questions. And this questioning echoes, not in the ivory towers of philosophers and specialists, but in the street and deep in the hearts of ordinary men and women.

Some might say that what we are observing today is simply a growth of superstition or a cultural expression in peoples who, in defending their identities, return fanatically to their sacred books and spiritual leaders. Some might also say, pessimistically, in keeping with certain historical interpretations, that all of this signifies a return to the Dark Ages. However one prefers to view it, the theme of God remains with us, and that's what counts.

I believe that Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead marks a decisive moment in the long history of the theme of God, at least from the point of view of a negative or "radical" theology, as some defenders of this position wish to call it.

It is clear that Nietzsche did not locate himself in the space of the dueling ground habitually marked out for their debates by theists and atheists, by spiritualists and materialists. Instead, Nietzsche asked himself: Is it that people still believe in God, or is it that a process has begun that will do away with belief in God? In *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* he says: "And thus the old man and the young man went their separate ways, laughing like children.… But when Zarathustra was alone, he spoke in this way to his heart: 'Can it be possible? This old saint in his forest has heard nothing of the death of God!'" And in the fourth part of that same book, Zarathustra asks, "'What does everyone know today? Perhaps that the old God in whom everyone once *believed* is alive no longer.' 'You've said it,' replied the saddened old man. 'And I have served that God to his last hour.'" In addition, in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science,* there appears the parable of the madman seeking God in the public square, who says, "I will tell you where God is…God has died! And he's still dead!" But his listeners do not understand, and the madman explains that he has arrived prematurely, that the death of God is *still* happening.

It is clear from the passages I've cited that Nietzsche was referring to a *cultural process,* to the displacement of a belief, and leaving aside any exact determination of the existence or non-existence of God *per se.* The implications of the displacement of that belief are of enormous consequence, because that belief carries along with it a whole system of values, at least in the West and in the time that Nietzsche wrote. And that "high-water mark of nihilism" Nietzsche predicted for the times that were to come has as a backdrop his announcement of the death of God.

Within this conception, one might think that if the values of an age are based on God, and God disappears, then a new system of ideas must of necessity arise, a system that accounts for the totality of existence and justifies a new morality. Such a system of ideas must give an account of the world, of history, of the human being and the meaning of the human being, of society, of coexisting with others, of good and bad, of what one should and should not do. Now, ideas of that sort had begun to appear long before their culmination in the great constructions of critical idealism and absolute idealism. And, in that case it made no difference whether a system of thought was applied in an idealist or materialist direction, because its framework, its methodology of knowledge and action, was strictly rational, and in any case it could not account for the totality, the entirety, of life. But in the Nietzschean interpretation, things happened in just the opposite way: Ideologies arose out of life itself in order to give justification and meaning to that life.

We should recall that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, both engaged in struggle against the rationalism and idealism of their time, became the forerunners of existentialism. However, the description and comprehension of the structure of human life had still not appeared on the philosophical horizon of those authors, as this would occur only later. It was as though in the background there was still at work the definition of man as the "rational animal," as nature endowed with reason, and this reason could be understood in terms of animal evolution, or "reflection," or other such ideas. At that time one might still legitimately think that "reason" was the most important thing or, conversely, that instincts and the dark forces of life governed reason. This latter belief was the case for Nietzsche and the vitalists in general. But following the "discovery" of "human life" things have changed… And here I should apologize for not developing this point further, but there is simply not sufficient time to do this today. I would, however, like to relieve a little the sense of strangeness or uneasiness that we may experience when we hear that "human life" is a recent discovery that only recently has begun to be understood.

In two words: Since the first human beings we have all known that we *live* and that we are *human;* we have all experienced our life. And yet in the field of ideas, the understanding of *human life* with its own particular structure and its own particular characteristics is very recent. This is like saying: We humans have always had DNA and RNA in our cells, but it was only recently that those molecules were discovered and their function understood. In this state of affairs, concepts such as *intentionality, opening,* the *historicity of consciousness, intersubjectivity,* the *horizon of consciousness,* and so on have only recently been defined in the field of ideas, and with this *we have begun to see not the structure of life in general, but the structure of "human life," and this has resulted in a definition of the human phenomenon radically different from that of the human being as "rational animal."* Thus, for example, animal life, natural life, begins at the moment of conception—but when does *human* life begin, if it is by definition "being-in-the-world," which is opening and social environment? Or consider, is consciousness simply a *reflection* of natural and "objective" conditions, or is it rather

intentionality, which configures and modifies the given conditions? Or, for example, is the human being "completed," finished once and for all, or instead a being capable of modifying itself and constructing itself not only in the social and historical sense but biologically as well? Thus, with endless such examples of the new problems raised by the discovery of the *structure of human life,* we may well have to move beyond the ambit of the questions that were asked within the historical horizon in which the definition of the human being as "rational animal" was still the prevailing one—the epoch of "God is dead."

To return to our subject, if, with the death of God, no replacement appeared that could give a foundation to the world and human activity, or if a rational system was forcibly imposed in which the fundamental thing—life itself—escaped, then chaos and the collapse of values would ensue, dragging down all of civilization along with it. Nietzsche called this "the high-water mark of nihilism" and on occasion "the Abyss." It is clear that neither his studies in *On the Genealogy of Morals* nor his ideas in *Beyond Good and Evil* managed to produce the "transmutation of values" he so earnestly sought. Instead, seeking something that could surpass his nineteenth-century "last man," he constructed a Superman who, as in the most recent versions of the Golem legend, came to life and began to walk about out of control, destroying everything in its path. Irrationalism was on the rise, and the "will to power" came to stand as the highest value, constituting the ideological underpinning of one of the greatest monstrosities history has ever recorded.

There was no new, positive foundation of values able to resolve or overcome the pronouncement "God is dead," and the great philosophical constructions found themselves now, in the early part of this century, at an impasse, unable to accomplish this task. Today, we still find ourselves immobilized in the face of these questions: Why should we exercise solidarity toward others? For what cause should we risk our future? Why should we struggle against injustice? Simply out of necessity, or for some historical reason, or because of some natural order? Is the old morality based on God, yet today without God, perhaps felt as a need? None of this is sufficient!

And if today we find ourselves with the historical impossibility of new all-encompassing systems arising that could serve as a foundation, the situation seems to grow even more complicated. Remember that the last great philosophical vision appeared in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in 1900, the same year as a complete vision of the human psyche was proposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams.* The view of the universe in physics was shaped in 1905 and 1916 in Einstein's theories of relativity; the systematization of logic was given by Russell and Whitehead in *Principia Mathematica* in 1910 and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921. And then in 1927 Heidegger's *Being and Time,* an unfinished work that proposed to lay the foundations of a new phenomenological ontology, marked the beginning of the period of rupture in great systems of thought.

Here, we must stress, we are not talking about an interruption in thinking itself, but rather the impossibility of continuing the creation of grand systems capable of giving foundation to everything. The same impulse of that earlier period was also felt in the grandiosity of works in the field of aesthetics: Consider the examples of Stravinsky, Bartok, and Sibelius; Picasso and the muralists Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros; writers like Joyce, who tried to fully capture the onrushing steam-of-consciousness; epic filmmakers such as Eisenstein; the Bauhaus architects led by Gropius; the urbanists and monumental architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. And has artistic production lagged in the years since then? Of course not, but it

occurs under a different sign: It is modular, it deconstructs, it is adapted to its surroundings, it is carried out by teams and specialists—it has become technical in the extreme.

The soulless political regimes that came to power in those days, and in their moment gave the illusion of monolithic completeness, might well be understood as factive throwbacks to delirious romanticisms, titanisms of the transformation of the world at any price. They inaugurated the era of high-tech barbarism, the suppression of human beings by the millions, nuclear terror, chemical and biological weapons, and large-scale environmental pollution and destruction. This is the high-water mark of nihilism that, in Zarathustra, heralded the destruction of all values and the death of God!

What do people believe in today? Perhaps in new alternatives for life? Or do people simply let themselves be swept along by a current that now seems to them irresistible and completely independent of their intentionality? The predominance of technology over science, the exclusively analytical vision of the world, and the dictatorship of abstract money over the concrete realities of production—all these are now firmly entrenched. In that swirling magma, the ethnic and cultural differences believed overcome in the process of history are once again being revived. Systems of any kind are rejected by deconstructionism, postmodernism, and structuralist currents. The frustration of thinking has become a commonplace among the "philosophers of weak intelligence." The hodgepodge of styles that swiftly supplant one another, the destructuring of human relationships, and the perpetration of all manner of fraud and deceit recall the eras of imperial expansion in ancient Persia, Greece, or Rome…

I do not mean by any of this to propose a kind of historical morphology, a spiral model of a process that is fed by analogies. I am simply trying to point out certain aspects of today's world that we find not in the least surprising or difficult to believe, because they have flourished at other times in history, though not in the present context of globalization and material progress. Nor do I wish to transmit a sense of inexorable mechanical sequence in which human intention counts for nothing. Indeed, I believe the opposite—I believe that with reflection, inspired by humanity's experience down through history, we are today in a position to begin a new civilization, the first truly planetary civilization. But the conditions for that leap are extremely challenging. Think of how the gap between the postindustrial information societies and the societies of hunger is widening. Think of the growth of marginalization and poverty even within the wealthy societies, and the yawning generation gap that appears to be bringing to a halt the historical march in which the new surpasses the old. Think of the dangerous concentration of international financial capital, mass terrorism, sudden secessions, ethnic and cultural conflicts, increasing environmental imbalances, and population explosion with megalopolises teetering on the verge of collapse. In thinking about all this, even without becoming apocalyptic, you will have to agree that the current picture presents many difficulties.

In my view, the problem lies in the difficult transition between the world we have known until now and the world that is coming. And as at the end of any civilization and the beginning of another, we will have be alert to possible financial collapse, possible administrative destructuring and breakdown, possible replacement of nation states by parastates or even gangs, the possibility of widespread injustice, disheartenment, the diminishing of the human being, the dissolving of bonds between people, loneliness, growing violence, and emergent irrationalism—and all of this in an ever-accelerating, ever more global setting. Above all, we have to consider what new image of the world to propose. What kind of society do we want, what kind of economy, what values, what kind of interpersonal relationships, what kind of

dialogue between each human being and his or her neighbor, each human being and his or her soul?

Nevertheless, for each new proposal that could be made, there are at least two impossibilities: first, that no complete system of thought will remain standing in a time of destructuring; and second, that no rational articulation of discourse can be carried on beyond immediate matters of practical life or matters of technology. These two difficulties impede the possibility of laying the foundation for any far-reaching new values.

If God has not died, then religions have responsibilities to humanity that they must fulfill. Today they have a duty to create a new psychosocial atmosphere, to address themselves as teachers to their faithful, and to eradicate all vestiges of fanaticism and fundamentalism. They cannot turn away and remain indifferent to the hunger, ignorance, bad faith, and violence in today's world. They must contribute vigorously to tolerance and foster dialogue with other beliefs and every person who feels a sense of responsibility for the destiny of humankind. They must open themselves—and I hope this won't be taken as irreverence—to manifestations of God in the many cultures. We are waiting for them and expecting them to make this contribution to the common cause in this exceedingly difficult moment.

If, on the other hand, God has died in the heart of religions, then we can be sure that God will return to life in a new dwelling, as we learn from the history of the origins of every civilization—and that new dwelling will be in the heart of the human being, far removed from every institution and all power.

Thank you very much.