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**The Rhetoric of the Ineffable-
Awakening in Judaism, Christianity and Zen**

Committee:

Barry Brummett, Supervisor

Robert Abzug

Dana Cloud

Joshua Gunn

Margaret Syverson

**The Rhetoric of the Ineffable-
Awakening in Judaism, Christianity and Zen**

by

Sharon Avital, B.A.; M.A.

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TO MY PARENTS

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**The Rhetoric of the Ineffable-
Awakening in Judaism, Christianity and Zen**

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This dissertation rhetorically analyzes the ways in which ineffable moments of awakening are constructed in the context of three religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Zen. Close textual analysis revealed that awakening is constructed differently in all three religions and that ineffability itself assumed different meanings in all cases. The conventional understanding of language as arbitrary and as based on human convention does not apply to Hebrew which takes itself to be a sacred language. Words are understood in this tradition as creative elements that convey more than trivial information and the term ineffability does not occupy much thought in Judaism. Christianity is grounded in a representative model of language and equates words with mortality and temporality. Awakening is constructed ontologically as moments in which textuality and corporality are transcended and one merges with the infinite divine. Zen is cautious about the ways in which language constructs the illusion of

distinct identities, but ineffability is not constructed as an ontological concept in this tradition. Awakening is understood as beyond all words.

The tropes recognized in the Jewish construction of awakening are metonymy, dialogue, differences, juxtapositions, particularities, haunting, and intertextuality. In Christianity, the dominant tropes are allegory, typology, metaphors, substitution, replacement and abstraction. Awakening is modeled after the resurrection of Jesus and is understood as a dramatic and ineffable event. The dominant rhetorical moves in Zen are suchness, nonsense, and paradoxes.

Differences are also found between the construction of subjectivity, the perception of time, aesthetics, the linguistic model and ineffability. Judaism views itself as an architecture of time, but this time is not linear and is instead understood by the qualitative moments of the events. Awakening maintains the reverberations of past events into the present, but present moments are given significant attention. In Christianity, man is understood as grounded in space and progressing on a linear axis of time from birth towards his telos. Ineffability is constructed spatially and the event of awakening divides life into before and after. Zen attempts to deconstruct time and views it as *sunyata*, or “emptiness”.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION- INEFFABILITY AND AWAKENING

Mask, the Oscar-winning film by Peter Bogdanovich, portrays the life of sixteen-year-old Rocky (played by Eric Stoltz) whose skull is severely deformed due to a rare birth defect. Rocky and his biker-gang mother (portrayed by Cher) try to live a normal life in spite of the difficulties. Rocky volunteers at a camp for the blind and falls in love with a beautiful blind girl, Diana (portrayed by Laura Dern). While riding horses through a beautiful landscape, Rocky attempts to describe the green hills, the blue ocean and the billowing white clouds. Alas, he keeps stumbling upon adjectives (e.g., green, blue) that mean absolutely nothing to Diana. Rocky is puzzled by the unexpected challenge—how to describe colors to a congenitally blind person? He ends up relinquishing language altogether and resorts to another mode of expression: tactile experience. To communicate ‘blue,’ he puts a very cold rock in her palm; to convey ‘red’, he gives her a stone heated in hot water; to express ‘white’, he gives her some fluffy cotton. Where language proved inadequate for conveying certain impressions such as forms and colors, tactile experience has become the only mode of acquiring knowledge.

Similarly, in reference to mystical experience, teachers testify that the realization or understanding gained by a spiritual ‘awakening’ cannot be achieved through verbal explanation alone. Linguistic description of spiritual realization, they say, is as futile as the effort to explicate the taste of chocolate to one who has never tasted it or as useless as describing colors to a blind person. Likewise, in his book *Real Presences*, George Steiner suggests that aesthetic appreciation—especially in the experience of poetry and music—

has extremes of un-analyzable experience that carry the sense of something beyond language. Those areas elude criticism and are hard to come to terms with.¹

This experiential something which eludes language is beautifully conveyed in Jack Kerouac's classic, *On the Road*. Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) talks excitedly with Sal Paradise (Jack Kerouac) about a saxophone player they heard at a jazz club the previous night.

Now, man, that alto man last night had IT-- he held it once he found it; I've never seen a guy who could hold so long." I wanted to know what "IT" meant. "Ah well"-- Dean laughed-- "now you're asking me impon-de-rables--ahem! Here's a guy and everybody's there, right? Up to him to put down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he *gets it*-- everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT--" Dean could go no further; he was sweating telling about it.²

As Dean explains the special quality of the performance he has witnessed, it becomes clear that the special effect cannot be reduced to the tune, or the melody. The effort to convey that experience exhausts Dean who reaches a limit and must resort to a different way of explanation and brings the speaker to exhaustion when he attempts to nevertheless explain it. "IT" becomes Jack Kerouac's place holder for the ineffable in aesthetic appreciation.

¹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

² Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

‘IT’ points to a certain beyond, just over the edge, or to a certain indefinable quality that is ironically a presence in absence. This ineffable quality is hard to pin down, but its effect is visceral and important enough to be recognized by many: for Jacques Derrida it is the *secret*³ that can be equated with death, for Lyotard it is the *sublime*⁴ and for Lacan it is *the Thing*⁵. The importance of this ineffable quality was recognized by Paul Valery who pronounced: “That which is not ineffable has no importance (“Ce qui n’est pas ineffable n’a aucune importance.”) Some things such as aesthetic appreciation, pain, love, and mystical experience elude language and therefore any attempt to translate them into logical language appears to be pointless. Kerouac and others of the Beat generation chose to cope with it by focusing on experience and drugs as a way to get directly to IT or to the Thing without the mediation of language. While their primary preoccupation was with direct experience, many also felt called to explore the possibilities of expressing their experiences in language. Certainly, the need to discuss the ineffable still exists—the culture generates volumes of work about aesthetics; sick people find ways to convey their ineffable pain to doctors; lovers communicate their ineffable longing to one another, and spiritual teachers teach mysticism to the ‘blind.’ As William Frank suggests, although it seems that the only appropriate means to approach

³ Jacques Derrida et al., *A Taste for the Secret* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2001).

⁴ Jean François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime : Kant's Critique of Judgment, [Sections] 23-29* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵ Peter Van Haute, " Death and Sublimation in Lacan’s Reading of Antigone ." in *Levinas and Lacan- the Missed Encounter*, ed. S. Harasym (Albany: State University of New York: 1998).

the ineffable is silence, in practice, endless discourses are generated when writers nevertheless attempt to convey it.⁶

At the heart of the tension between experience and expression are the limitations imposed upon it by the faculty of language. The failure of language to capture the essence of a 'thing' requires immense efforts on behalf of those trying to communicate it, thus creating a whole gamut of rhetorical tropes and maneuvers, including the disclaimer that the experience described cannot necessarily be put into words. Linguistic creativity is malleable and always stretches the laws regulating it. Roland Barthes urged writers and critics to work at the limits of language in order to avoid what he perceived to be the fascist laws of language. Paul Ricoeur insists that language is not a mere stylistic device. Rather, the language of poetry and myth has the capacity to create new worlds and open up a new horizon of meanings and being in the world. In fact, "to rework language is to rediscover what we are. What is lost in experience is often salvaged in language, sedimented as deposit of traces, as a thesaurus."⁷ Opening up new worlds through language can transcend the restricting limitations of this world, limitations which are often enforced by this system of signs due to their regulatory nature.

In order to express what cannot be expressed, and make readers *feel* what cannot be put into logical language, writers must create new devices for expression. The need to transcend the constraints of language forces one to exhaust linguistic resources and to

⁶ Arthur W. Frank, "Varieties and Valences of Unsayability," *Philosophy and literature* 29, no. 2 (2005): 489.

⁷ Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester, UK ; Dover, N.H., USA: Manchester University Press, 1984), 28.

evoke the nonverbal, the bodily, and the unconventional. Instead of reflections, we can expect gestures toward concepts or feelings. Instead of utterances, we can expect evocation. And instead of mirroring and perfection, we can expect a new type of aesthetic appreciation of shadows—an appreciation of what cannot be reflected directly, but which is still made manifest by the object with which it is a part. Consequently, not only does the ineffable present the rhetorician with a much wider “terrain” for investigation than the effable has traditionally presented, but it may also elicit some of the most interesting rhetorical investigations.

This study has therefore taken upon itself to rhetorically explore the problem of the ineffable and the ways in which things that apparently resist language are nevertheless conveyed. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on the rhetoric of *Awakening*, a term which I use in my work to refer to transformative moments in peoples’ lives. These moments tend to occur suddenly and in ways which cannot be put into words; however—and perhaps more importantly-- people still feel compelled to talk about them. In this moment, the individual’s relation to their previous experience *changes*; they transform emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes even physically—shedding their previous identity while acquiring a new one. The study of awakening is the study of impasses, of major obstacles that are radically met, and transformed. The question nevertheless remains, if those impasses resist language—how can they be communicated to oneself and others?

Eckhart Tolle's book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* is a case at hand.⁸ Tolle's first book, *The Power of Now*, is also a demonstrative text that deals with the concept of awakening. It was translated into 33 languages and was a number one bestseller on the New York Times book list. His last book—*A New Earth* was selected by Oprah Winfrey for her book club and was accompanied by a ten week online seminar. Each of the chapters was released online, drawing huge crowds averaging 750,000 people and which have since been viewed by hundreds of thousands more. In his books, Tolle describes his spiritual awakening and provides guidance for others on how to live wholesome lives and experience 'awakening' on their own. Tolle addresses those questions people constantly pose to him, such as, *what is 'presence'?* In other words, *what is an awakened state of being?* Tolle's first answer is that presence is beyond conceptualization. Nevertheless, he tries to explain this ineffable state to his massive audience. He describes 'awakening' or 'enlightenment' as a "discontinuity" in development, "a leap to an entirely different level of Being and, most importantly, a lessening of materiality."⁹ Although 'awakening' can be classified as an ineffable experience, Tolle's book demonstrates that millions of people are currently yearning to read and talk about it. Although (or perhaps *because*) 'awakening' resists representation, it is one of the topics people are most fascinated by. What is more, according to Tolle's teachings, an increasing number of people are currently going through awakening experiences due to global transformations and a growing need for people to 'wake up'. It

⁸ Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth : Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* (New York, N.Y.: Dutton/Penguin Group, 2005).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

is for this reason (among others to be outlined shortly) that this dissertation seeks to elucidate how the ineffable is communicated in different discourses of *awakening*. The question of the ineffable is part of a larger question of *representation*, of how the immaterial and intangible are brought into existence by their exhibition in form. Hence, my dissertation surveys the theories of the topic as well as addresses the aesthetics of the ineffable.

An exploration into this field of study is essential to identifying the rhetorical problem of the ineffable—that is: the need to express certain things that, at least on the face of it, resist language. Since awakening is an inexpressible yet meaningful experience of human transformation, studying the rhetoric of awakening entails the exploration of suffering and rebirth during the moment in which it finds expression. The discourses surrounding this visceral and intrinsically human experience can teach us about the creation of language and the ways in which the construction of the self takes place. As such, this study hopes to expand not only what it means to awaken, but also what it means to be human. Working at the edge of language and the dissolution of the body, this study broadens to use Derrida’s term of ‘otherness’, the expanding horizons of the Otherness of language,¹⁰ as well as the lexicon of different modes of expression.

In the next pages I discuss the problem of the ineffable. I begin with a short description of the relevance of the ineffable within the field of rhetoric. I continue with a

¹⁰ In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida protests against frequent misinterpretation of his theories and the common claim that logocentrism implies that nothing exists beyond language in which we are imprisoned. Specifically, he claims: “It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the ‘other’ of language “ (Kearney, 1984, p.123).

definition of the ineffable and a short history of the *topos*. This is followed by a description of epistemology and ineffability as well as the variety and types of ineffable experiences, mainly: mystical experience, aesthetics, love, pain and awakening. Awakening—the ineffable experience at the center of this dissertation—will be analyzed in more depth. I conclude with an outline of the research questions, the methodology employed to address these questions, the texts which are to be analyzed, and the dissertation chapters which are to follow this one.

The Ineffable and Rhetoric

The ineffable can easily be considered as anti-rhetoric since on the face of it, it leaves the writer with not much material to write about. However, studying the ineffable can teach us about the ways in which topics that seemingly elude language are still addressed. Therefore, it can teach us about the limitations of language and the parameters of symbolic expression. When trying to understand the ways in which the ineffable fits into the field of rhetoric, it is first important to realize the breadth of what is meant by ‘rhetoric.’ Although rhetoric generally refers to the art of influence through language and manipulation in popular discourse, the scope and meaning of ‘rhetoric’ differs from scholar to scholar. Cicero conceived of rhetoric pragmatically as “the art of effective persuasion”¹¹ and Quintilian similarly defined it as “the science of speaking well.”¹² During the Renaissance, Vico saw rhetoric as the study of human expression through the

¹¹ Cicero, "De Orator," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000).

¹² Quintilian, "The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers 2000).

study of language,¹³ while Ramus perceived rhetoric as nothing more than aesthetic and stylistic concerns¹⁴. Among the more famous contemporary definitions for rhetoric in the twentieth century are: “a study of misunderstandings and its remedies;”¹⁵ “adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas;”¹⁶ and “the use of language as symbolic means for inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.”¹⁷ As evidenced by this sample of definitions, there is a growing tendency in the current academic discourse to stretch the limits of rhetorical discourse as well as what is meant by ‘language’ itself.

In particular, the last few years witnessed attempts to expand the domain of rhetoric ever wider. Dilip Ganokar claims that rhetoric is everywhere and that never before in the history of rhetoric—not even during its glory days in the Italian renaissance—did its proponents claim so universal a scope for rhetoric as some postmodern neosophists do today.¹⁸ Booth explains at the outset of his book *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* that rhetoric encompasses almost every aspect of our lives. For him, rhetoric is:

the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another, effects ethical (including everything about character), practical (including political), emotional (including aesthetic), and intellectual (including every

¹³ Giambattista Vico, "On the Study Methods of Our Times," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000).

¹⁴ Peter Ramus, "Arguments in Rhetoric against Quintilian," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory* ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000).

¹⁵ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1st ed., Mary Flexner Lectures on the Humanities ; 3 (New York ; London: Oxford university press, 1936).

¹⁶ Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Its Scope," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 4 (1953).

¹⁷ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

¹⁸ Parameshwar Ganokar, Dilip,, "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science," in *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*, ed. Alan G.; Keith Gross, William, M, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

academic field). It is the entire range of our use of ‘signs’ for communicating, effectively or sloppily, ethically or immorally.¹⁹

Since awakening entails a physical, mental and spiritual transformation—and since the ineffable pushes us to the end of our linguistic resources—the body as a rhetorical trope becomes ever more significant and conducive to modern interpolation. Indeed, endeavors in the field of rhetoric increasingly deal with the possibilities of expression afforded by the body. The anthology *Rhetorical Bodies* demonstrates this current tendency:

Language and rhetoric have a persistent material aspect that demands acknowledgment, and material realities often (if not always) contain a rhetorical dimension that deserves attention: for language is not the only medium or material that speaks. The factory and assembly line, the prison and the hospital and school, as Marx and Foucault have taught so well, have explicitly coercive functions that rehearse the highly persuasive if less overt ways in which other material realities, cultural practices, and physical bodies shape and persuade.²⁰

Since the material condition has not been fully or clearly elaborated in rhetorical studies throughout the years, the authors of *Rhetorical Bodies* take it upon themselves to rhetorically investigate material conditions as well as examine the traditional rhetorical texts with attention to the material conditions under which they operate. In a more recent article, Debra Hawhee endorses the value of expanding rhetoric and composition into other disciplines. She acknowledges the growing awareness of the “non-rational, messy, affective, bodily aspects” of rhetoric, and calls for integrating them in the classroom.²¹

¹⁹ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*, Blackwell Manifestos (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004).

²⁰ Jack Selzer, "Habeas Corpus: An Introduction," in *Rhetorical Bodies*, ed. Jack Selzer, & Crowley, Sharon (Madison, Wisconsin University of Wisconsin press, 1999), 8.

²¹ Debra Hawhee, "Rhetorics, Bodies, and Everyday Life," *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2006).

An even more ambitious stretch of what is meant by rhetoric can be found in those books that rhetorically explore the most a-rhetorical material: silence. In her book *Unspoken- A Rhetoric of Silence*,²² Cheryl Glenn investigates the ways in which silence can be as powerful as words and the ways in which silence is politically utilized to marginalize groups. Her book follows other important works in literary studies that amplified the limits and definition of discourse by studying not only what is said but also the things that are absent. In 1948, Max Picard wrote what is perhaps the first and important book on the topic *The World of Silence*.²³ In this short and poetic treatise, Picard defines silence as an objective ontological presence, much like words.

Due to growing concern with the potentialities and limitations of language, books dealing directly with discourses of silence have also become more prevalent. Those books were often inspired by previous works in mystical writings and the arts where silence has always been a concern. For example, Bernard Dauenhauer's *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* dealt with silence as a *phenomenon*,²⁴ while George Kalamaras' rhetorical analysis of silence in *Reclaiming the Tacit dimension* explores silence as a mode of *knowing*.²⁵ In this book, Kalamaras shows the long tendency in the West to perceive silence as a negative state that exists outside of the domain of language. Kalamaras uses Eastern mystical philosophy to redefine silence as a

²² Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken : A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

²³ Max Picard, *The World of Silence* (Washington, D.C. New York, N.Y.: Regnery Gateway ; Distributed to the trade by Kampmann & Co., 1988).

²⁴ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence, the Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

²⁵ George Kalamaras, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension : Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence*, Suny Series, Literacy, Culture, and Learning (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994).

mode of knowing that is unbounded by categories and that is nevertheless as meaningful as discourse. He reclaims the tacit dimension of silence by “locating it as *rhetoric*.”²⁶ In her book *Immemorial Silence* Karmen Mackendrick explores the questions of language and its limits—as well as time and eternity—through the work of authors in philosophy, literature and religion.²⁷ In *Manifesto for Silence* Stuart Sim writes about the virtues and politics of silence.²⁸ Similarly to Mackendrick, he does that by exploring the realms of religion, the arts, literature, philosophy and language—wherein silence is an integral component of their expression. In a somewhat prophetic tone, Walsh, in his book *Dark Matters*, insists on the existence of modes of knowing that are not dependent on language. He performs close readings of texts and meticulously demonstrates the ways in which silences, gaps and the ineffable are constructed in literary texts. In all these books, silence has been configured as a way of getting to the ineffable and exploring the possibilities of expression.²⁹ In 1982, Kawin wrote his important book *The Mind of the Novel* wherein he interrogates the myriad of ways in which the inexpressible self is literarily constructed.³⁰ This work did not deal directly with silence itself, but with the possibilities of expression when tackling the difficulties in articulating subjectivity.

The discursive and ontological construction of silence—and, to a very limited extent, the ineffable itself—has been tackled by some writers. Nevertheless, more work

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Karmen MacKendrick, *Immemorial Silence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

²⁸ Stuart Sim, *Manifesto for Silence : Confronting the Politics and Culture of Noise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Timothy Walsh, *The Dark Matter of Words : Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).

³⁰ Bruce F. Kawin, *The Mind of the Novel : Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982).

needs to be done in this field. If we consider the fact that what cannot adequately be expressed in language comprises a large part of human experience, it becomes especially surprising that such little work has been done in the area.

The Ineffable – Definition and History

Language has long been venerated as the one thing that separates humanity from the realm of animals. In the Judaic tradition, the world was created through an act of speaking: “and god said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light.” The Aramaic word ‘abracadabra’, which literally means to create or manifest by word, has come to be equated with magic, thus establishing a connection between language and paranormal creation. The respect for language as a world-creating force also acknowledges the dangers of expression. Once a word is given, a terrain is marked and the ineffable beyond can be reduced and changed to something else. This admiration for the spoken word carried over into Christianity: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God.” The celebration of language as human achievement is explicated in George Steiner’s *Language and Silence*:

That articulation of speech should be the line dividing man from the myriad forms of animate being, that speech should define man’s singular eminence above the silence of the plant, the grunt of the beast... is classical doctrine well before Aristotle. We find it in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. Man is to Aristotle, a being of the word. How the word came to him is, as Socrates admonishes in the *Cratylus*, a question worth asking ... but it is not a question to which a certain answer lies in human reach.

Possessed of speech, possessed by it, the word having chosen the grossness and infinity of man’s condition for its own compelling life, the human person has broken free from the great silence of matter. Or, to use Ibsen’s image: struck with the hammer, the insensate ore has begun to sing.³¹

In his pioneering book *The World of Silence*, Max Picard views silence as something positive, original and self evident just like life and death. It is not identical

³¹ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 36.

with the cessation of language, but is rather “an independent whole, subsisting in and through itself.” Importantly, Picard finds silence as formative to human beings as it is to language. Consequently, even for Picard, language remains the one thing “that makes man truly human. The word has supremacy over silence.”³² It is no wonder then that language itself has long been recognized as human achievement and as a sign of culture, liberation and power.³³ Despite the unquestionable status of language (at least in the Western tradition), philosophers, poets, and religious teachers have all referred to its limitations in describing the broad horizons of actual experiences.

The term ‘ineffable’ originates from the Greek tradition out of two lines of thought: the rhetorical-literary and the mystical-religious. The first of these, the rhetorical-literary, represents a secular use of the *topos*—which either indicates the speaker’s self-confessed inadequacy and modesty, or is used to extol a creature beyond words. On the other hand, the mystical-religious tradition of ineffability is associated with mystical experience that is beyond the reach of human reason and language. The ineffable, therefore, was already referred to by early philosophers such as Plato.

In his myriad writings, Plato compares love to mystical experience, emphasizing the need to transcend bodily existence in order to experience that which is beyond words. In the *Seventh Letter*, he writes about the inadequacy of language for describing the essential reality:

For everything that exists there are three classes of objects through which knowledge about it must come; the knowledge itself is a fourth, and we must put

³² Picard, *The World of Silence*, 15.

³³ Glenn, *Unspoken : A Rhetoric of Silence*.

as a fifth entity the actual object of knowledge which is the true reality. We have then, first, a name, second, a description, third, an image, and fourth, a knowledge about the object...

Furthermore these four [names, descriptions, bodily forms, concepts] do as much to illustrate [merely] the particular quality of any object as they do to illustrate its essential reality because of the inadequacy of language. Hence no intelligent man will ever be so bold as to put into language those things which his reason has contemplated, especially not into a form that is unalterable—which must be the case with what is expressed in written symbols.³⁴

Plotinus—to cite another example—was a third century Hellenistic philosopher, a vocation which, for his time and culture, comprised a way of life. His work included philosophy, psychology, and religion and he considered himself a faithful exploiter of Plato's thought, though he went well beyond him. Like Plato, Plotinus spoke of the need to transcend bodily sense-experience in the endeavor to know true being, incorporated talk of love and ecstasy in the pursuit, and highlighted the inadequacy of language to depict the resultant experience. For Plotinus, experience is beyond language because it is beyond rational thought itself:

He who wishes to contemplate what is beyond the intelligible will contemplate it when he has let all the intelligible go; he will learn that is by means of the intelligible, but what it is like by letting the intelligible go. But his is “what it is like” must indicate that it is “not like”: for there is no “being like” in what is not a “something.” But we in our travail do not know what we ought to say, and are speaking of what cannot be spoken...³⁵

Plotinus explains the reason for the inadequacy of language to describe the mystical experience:

³⁴ Plato, Edith Hamilton, and Huntington Cairns, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, Bollingen Series, (New York]: Pantheon Books, 1961), 1589-90.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Plotinus. Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West*, trans. Arthur Armstrong, Hilary (London: Allen and unwin, 1953), 5.5.6.

Discursive thought, in order to express anything in words, has to consider one thing after another: this is the method of description; but how can one describe the absolutely simple? But it is enough if the intellect comes into contact with it; but when it has done so, while the contact lasts, it is absolutely impossible...to speak...How can this happen? Take away everything!³⁶

While language is linear, the essential experience of reality is very simple and direct, beyond concepts and the limitations that are inherent to the use of language. To experience that, therefore, one has to strip reality from the imposing rules of language.

Medieval thinkers acknowledged the minuteness of man before God, but they believed that divine instruction was given to man in order to teach and instruct about religion, so human language was perceived to be capable of wielding divine grace and of expressing something of the divine itself.³⁷ The designation of inexpressibility in literature became more pervasive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as evidenced by the addition of new words describing subtle differences of the ineffable. By the end of the eighteenth century, many emotions (not only those felt in the presence of God or the beloved) had become inexpressible. Among them were inspiration and other sensibilities that previously had not been recognized as beyond words.³⁸

The ineffable received increasing attention in the nineteenth-century with the growing influence of romanticism. The attention given to the sublime sentiment in philosophy and the arts is a part of this phenomenon. It was Mallarme and French symbolism however, that drew attention to the self reflexive rather than to the referential

³⁶ Ibid., 5.3.17.

³⁷ Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language; a Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge*, Yale Historical Publications. Miscellany, (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1968).

³⁸ "The Development of the Inexpressibility Topos in European Literature ", <http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-924898-2.pdf>

nature of words. Acutely aware of the limitations of words for describing grandeur, Mallarme even called for the abolishment of endeavoring to speak of all that lies beyond human language.³⁹ The focus on language has made it a topic for concern—language is not only a tool for expressing content, but a topic in and of itself.

The tendency to acknowledge the ineffable and the inadequacy of language to describe much of existence continued into the twentieth century. Key figures in European modernist poetry such as Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Valerie and Montale, industriously returned to these themes. Evidence of this growing concern can be found in the increased use of terms pertaining to ineffability and references to things such as smells, colors, and human features as inexpressible. In modernist times, the topos of the ineffable is different from the past. The ineffable is no longer considered a failing of the individual poet who recognizes her human limitations, but is viewed as the inherent inadequacy of language.⁴⁰

This change of perception with regard to language is the result of historical, political, sociological and philosophical changes that have come together to create what is considered to be ‘the crisis of representation.’ Language has come to be considered inadequate for expressing things such as the tremendous political upheavals at the beginning of the twentieth century that culminated in the atrocities of the First World War. Rapid technological changes, the loss of founding truths such as the Newtonian conception of logically constructed science, and Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God have contributed to the dissolution of belief in a coherent, ordered and logical

³⁹ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, & Letters* (Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956).

⁴⁰ "The Development of the Inexpressibility Topos in European Literature ".

universe. Congruent with these changes, language also lost its status—as the image of the world dissolved, the belief in the power of the sign also disintegrated. Thus, linguistic signs were no longer considered to refer directly to reality and were viewed as incapable of representing it.⁴¹

Freud's theory of the mind and the new field of psychoanalysis contributed to a growing interest in the construction of the Self and its ineffability. The shifting focus from the conscious to the unconscious mind nurtured interest in those things that lurk beyond awareness yet still shape the conception of the Self. An example of the increasing instability in perception of the self is evidenced in Nietzsche's declaration that the existence of the 'I' should not mislead us into thinking that there exists a unified substance or organic cell which corresponds to it. Though a word "I" exists, what it refers to does not.⁴² The self is not considered stable anymore and is therefore difficult to capture in words. Poets and writers have thus faced new challenges when describing the individual and its behaviors. The fragmentary and ephemeral conception of the self is an especially important aspect of the ineffable to this dissertation. Experiences of awakening, as will be elaborated later, require a radical transformation. But if the self is not stable and is difficult to describe in the first place, the experience of awakening is even more challenging to pin down with language alone. Since the 'I' is considered to be

⁴¹ George Steiner, "The Poem on the Edge of the World: The Limits of Language and the Uses of Silence in the Poetry of Mallarme, Rilke and Vallejo," (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), ———, *Language and Silence : Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*, Yale University Press pbk. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), Dianna C. Niebylski, *The Poem on the Edge of the Word : The Limits of Language and the Uses of Silence in the Poetry of Mallarmé, Rilke, and Vallejo*, Studies in Modern Poetry, (New York: P. Lang, 1993).

⁴² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Karl Schlechta, *Werke*, 2. durchgesehene Aufl.] ed. (München,: C. Hanser, 1960), 8, "The Development of the Inexpressibility Topos in European Literature ".

just a mental construct, using words to describe the transition from one sense of ‘I’ to another becomes increasingly challenging.

The fascination with the ineffable and the limitations of language intensified well into the late twentieth century and was the subject of movements such as the Beat generation that focused on experience and drugs as means to get to the beyond. George Steiner nicely summarizes this stance toward language in *Real Presences*:

Speech can neither articulate the deeper truths of consciousness, nor can it convey the sensory, autonomous evidence of the flower, of the shaft of light, of the birdcall at dawning (it was in this incapacity in which Mallarmé located the autistic sovereignty of the word). It is not only that language cannot reveal these things: it labours to do so, to draw near to them, falsify, corrupt that which silence (the coda to the *Tractatus*), that which the unspeakable and unspeaking visitations of the freedom and mystery of being—Joyce’s term is “epiphany,” Walter Benjamin’s is “aura”—may communicate to us in privileged moments. Such transcendental intuitions have sources deeper than language, and must, if they are to retain their truth claims, remain undeclared.⁴³

The break from structuralism and the birth of post-structuralism intensified the disbelief in the ability of language to represent reality and capture the ineffable. Michel Foucault also brings to center stage the limits of discourse and the political implications of the linguistic possibilities. For him, the central question was: ‘What can be said?’ Foucault’s concept of discourse enables us to think about the epistemological power and rules of discourse, and the importance of understanding what can be articulated and when. In Foucault’s words: ‘It’s a problem of verbalization.’ As we will see in the second chapter, much of the writings of the post-structuralists or the “aporetic tradition” such as Jacques Derrida, Paul DeMan, Campbell, Lyotard and Žižek revolve around what cannot

⁴³ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 111-12.

be expressed. If, as Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva claim, signs can only point to themselves rather than to a stable and external reality, an unbridgeable rift between language and reality is seemingly created. The ineffable in post-structuralism does not equal to the transcendental and the sublime as it with some mystical traditions. Ineffability in post-structuralism refers to the problem of representation and the possibilities that can arise from attending to the contextual dimension of language.

Stemming from the mystical and the rhetorical traditions, the ineffable has thus preoccupied writers since antiquity. However, the status of the ineffable has changed. If the ineffable was considered to be a result of a personal limitation of the poet or something exclusive to mystical experience, the ineffable has gradually come to be considered an inevitable outcome of the limitations of human language. Consequently, the ineffable has become something to look at and study directly. Rapid technological changes, the world wars, and new scientific and philosophical changes—particularly, in the development of psychoanalysis and deconstructionism—have made the ineffable increasingly relevant. As meta-narratives dissolved and collapsed, so did the Self and the belief that language could accurately depict reality. As reality and the self have become less stable, coherent language has become even less capable of capturing the essence of the ineffable in words.

The Breadth of the Ineffable

The question of the ineffable is significantly related to the question of epistemology. If we know the world through language as some theories claim, then how

can we know the ineffable? If we have experiences that are clear and strong, why is it difficult to conceptualize them? Perhaps if we can understand the ways in which we come to know the ineffable, we might be able to understand what distinguishes ineffable knowledge from a different type of knowledge, and therefore may come to develop a deeper understanding of the difficulty of representation.

Michael Polanyi's work might prove helpful in answering these questions as we go deeper into the problem of the ineffable.⁴⁴ In his work, Polanyi develops a postmodern epistemology that attempts to overcome traditional dualism between the knower and the known, experience and representation. He draws several important distinctions with regard to different modes of knowing. The first distinction drawn is between focal awareness (to which we direct our awareness) and subsidiary awareness (things of which we are aware without focusing on them). One example used by Polanyi pertains to the way in which our awareness is divided when we use tools. For instance, when using a hammer to drive in a nail, we attend to both the hammer and the nail but in different ways. While the force invested to drive the nail in most effectively causes us to be very aware of the effect of the hammer hitting the nail, we only have subsidiary awareness of the hammer touching our palm. Another example pertains to language: when we read a text, our focal awareness is on the content, but our subsidiary awareness is on the language and syntax. Unless the writer has made a grammatical error, we are only minimally aware of the letters and the structure of the sentences. The difference between

⁴⁴ Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference" *Philosophy* 41 (1966), Jerry H. Gill, *Mediated Transcendence: A Postmodern Reflection* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1989).

focal and subsidiary awareness is not a matter of intensity, but of nature. When attending to any type of assignment, we hold focal awareness of one thing, but are also subsidiary aware of others. Problems may arise if we switch between the two types of awareness, making the thing of which we are only supplementally aware the focus of our attention. Polanyi gives the example of stage fright in which the subsidiary awareness of one's actions becomes the focus of attention, thus destroying one's sense of context and fluency of action.

The second distinction Polanyi draws is between the two poles on the "activity continuum." All human activity can be placed on a scale between conceptualization (which is mostly verbal), and embodiment, which pertains to nonverbal knowledge. Most of human knowledge is an inextricable mix of both conceptual and embodied knowledge. Even thinking can be accompanied by bodily movements, while physical movement is often accompanied by mental thinking. The implication of the above distinction is that every action on this continuum is accompanied by assertions and thought processes that unavoidably involve judgment. Whether an act is verbal or nonverbal is a question of degree, but all activities on the continuum involve cognitive processing.

The first distinction was between focal and subsidiary awareness and the second was between verbal and embodied activities. When these two distinctions interact, a third distinction is drawn between the explicit and tacit dimensions. According to Polanyi, when knowledge is formed based on subsidiary awareness and embodied activity, then it belongs to the tacit dimension. When focal awareness and conceptual activity are related, we get explicit knowledge. But all awareness and activities lie somewhere on a

continuum between subsidiary and focal awareness and between conceptual and embodied knowledge, so all knowledge involves both tacit and explicit knowledge and therefore lies on the cognitivity continuum.

It is important to emphasize the role of the body in acquiring knowledge. According to Polanyi's system, tacit knowledge is acquired through embodied and subsidiary activities. Bodies can thus be seen as instruments for attaining knowledge that is tacit. Motor knowledge, for example, can be obtained only by what Polanyi calls "indwelling." The only way to know some things is to dwell or participate in them. Indwelling is therefore an important means for attaining cognitive knowledge. As Polanyi puts it:

We know another person's mind by the same integrative processes by which we know life. A novice trying to understand the skill of a master, will seek *mentally* to combine his movements to the pattern to which the master combines them *practically*. By such exploratory indwelling the novice gets the feel of the master's skill. Chess players enter into a master's thought by repeating the games he played. *We experience a man's mind as the joint meaning of his actions* by dwelling in his actions from outside.⁴⁵

Polanyi's distinctions explain the inherent and varying nature of different types of knowledge. Tacit knowledge is gained through indwelling; it is embodied and formed when we do not focus on it directly. Therefore it is bodily expressed, more holistic, embodied subjectively and is more intuitive.⁴⁶

Polanyi's system also explains the nature of the ineffable and the inevitable difficulty of expressing some things in words. When an experience belongs to the tacit

⁴⁵ Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference": 14.

⁴⁶ Gill, *Mediated Transcendence : A Postmodern Reflection*, 59.

dimension and forms tacit knowledge, speaking about it requires a shift between different modes of knowing. In order to translate tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, the speaker must move on the continuum of awareness and activity and attend more directly and conceptually to this experience. Communicating the ineffable requires one to translate tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge when the two dimensions are in fact quite different in nature.

Polanyi's system also bridges the Cartesian schism between body and mind as it clarifies that epistemological thought is dependent on the body as much as it depends on the mind. Since we interact with the world around us through our bodies, all cognitive knowledge is to some extent physically constituted. Knowledge is mediated through both language and the body, but translating one type of mediated knowledge to another can prove to be problematic, hence, the ineffable. The ineffable thus serves as a catchall for all things tacit: visceral and intuitive experiences that are difficult to conceptualize. This explains why some types of knowledge are clearly felt but cannot adequately be expressed in words. The sense of an extra layer of meaning that cannot be denied but cannot be conveyed is the result of tacit knowing. Since this knowledge is acquired through the body and peripheral awareness, we know it exists at the same time as it remains elusive. For instance, we learn through indwelling how to ride a bicycle—a book will prove useless for teaching us these elementary skills. Importantly, although our bodies may know how to ride a bicycle, translating this tacit knowledge to the explicit realm would impair us with the helpless realization of the ineffable. In other words, the knowledge of bike riding or dancing exists 'somewhere,' but it is difficult to translate it

into an explicit knowing. And yet, artists, critics, philosophers and laymen constantly struggle and adapt as they attempt to convey this extra layer in words.

The problem of the ineffable is thus not an esoteric issue, but one that confronts everyone at one point or another. The effort to transcend the limitation of language in the effort to communicate what, by definition, cannot be communicated, is inextricably related to what gives rise to the quest for meaning and transcendence in art, religion, love and elsewhere. Interrogating discourses of the ineffable therefore taps into the question of knowing and expression. Studying the ways in which the ineffable is communicated enables us to look at the notion of the ‘secret’ (to use Derrida’s words) that is at the heart of human existence.

Mystical Experiences

In the previous section, I equated the ineffable with tacit knowledge and claimed that the question of the ineffable is a fundamental question of human existence. In this section, I discuss the variety of experiences that are commonly referred to as ineffable. Based on the previous discussion, we can expect these experiences to be embodied and intuitive. It should come as no surprise that those most preoccupied with the ineffable have been the mystics.

Indeed, the mystical traditions in particular have always recognized, in Norman Brown’s terms, “the neurotic character of language.”⁴⁷ In his survey of the immense variety of mystical experiences that take place across different cultures and religions, William James identifies ineffability as one of the most common and important features

⁴⁷ Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York,: Farrar, 1969), 23.

of mystical experience.⁴⁸ In three hefty volumes that were published between 1901-1902. Fritz Mauthner wrote in Germany a critique of language's futility when describing mystical experience. The mystic experiences unity that is beyond the ordinary sense experience, beyond the word of individuation and beyond speech and articulation. The true mystic is aware of the fundamental ineffability of the experience but is nevertheless yearning to communicate it. "As soon as we really have something to say," Mauthner explained, "we are forced to be silent." Yet, often the mystic, as Mauthner acknowledged, is torn between silence and a burning desire to communicate the content of his silence.⁴⁹ In his early writings, Buber also discussed the contradiction ecstatic feel between the desire to express and remember the experience and the inability to do so: "But what can it mean for the judgment of human beings who spend their lives in the torment of a monstrous contradiction: the contradiction between the inner experience and the commotion out of which they ascended, only to fall back into it again and again? That is the contradiction between ecstasy, which does not go into memory, and the desire to save it for memory, in the image, in speech, in confession."⁵⁰

Ineffability has also been directly addressed in some of the most important scriptures. The Taoist text *Tao Te Ching* famously begins with the following lines: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name." Ineffability is thus an essential characteristic of the mystical path and not a mere by product. The 18th century Kabbalist, Amdan, rebelled against some of the Kabbalist

⁴⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002).

⁴⁹ Cited in: Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, "Introduction," in *Ecstatic Confessions*, ed. Martin Buber (1985), xv.

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *Ecstatic Confessions*, trans. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 9.

books claiming that only the esoteric aspect of the Kabbalah is truthful, but this aspect cannot be written anywhere.⁵¹ Gershom Scholem, the important researcher of the Jewish mystical tradition, also claims that the Kabbalah cannot be given or taught since even its elements that can be taught, do not contain it any longer.⁵² This is because the scriptures themselves are identified with God and the consciousness cannot reach it.

One important vehicle for expressing mystical experience is through mythology. Susan Armstrong notes the linguistic connection between the three words; “myth,” “mysticism,” and “mystery.” All are derived from the Greek verb *nusteion*: To close the eyes or the mouth. All three words, she notes, are therefore rooted in an experience of darkness and silence.⁵³ Indeed, in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a principal Western mystical text written anonymously in England sometime during the mid-to late fourteenth century, the author recommends immediate experience that is grounded in “unknowing.” He uses the metaphors of darkness and a cloud when referring to the ineffable character of the experience:

Do not think that because I call it a “darkness” or a “cloud” it is the sort of cloud you see in the sky, or the kind of darkness you know at home when the light is out. That kind of darkness or cloud you can picture in your mind’s eye in the height of summer, just as in the depth of a winter’s night you can picture a clear and shining light. I do not mean this at all. By “darkness” I mean “a lack of knowing”—just as anything that you do not know or may have forgotten may be said to be “dark” to you, for you cannot see it with your inward eye. For this

⁵¹ Moshe Idel, *Hasidim: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, trans. Yadin Azan (Tel-Aviv: Schocken, 2000), 7.

⁵² Gershom Scholem, "Declaration of Loyalty to Our Language," in *Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, ed. Abraham Shapira (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1986), ———, "Ten a-Historical Articles on Kabbalah," in *Explications and Implications Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, ed. Abraham Shapira (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1986).

⁵³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God : The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Gramercy Books, 2004).

reason it is called “a cloud,” not of the sky of course, but “of unknowing,” a cloud of unknowing between you and your God.⁵⁴

Likewise, Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth century philosopher, believes that since no words can capture God, the only way to know him is through silence. Echoing Augustine, he says, “the dwelling-place of the soul, which God is, is unnamed. I say, God is unspoken, even that would be speech, and he is more silence than speech,”⁵⁵ Eckhart cites another authority to support his claim: “We say that God is spirit, Not so. If God were really a spirit, he would be spoken. According to St Gregory, we cannot rightly speak of God at all. Anything we say of him is bound to be a stammering.”⁵⁶ Stammering or broken speech represents the essential separation from God that cannot be overcome in language. Speaking of God is necessarily interrupted with silence, the abiding place out of which the ineffable presence and meaning can arise.

Silence does not necessarily mean the dual and complementary aspect of speech. Karmen Mackendrick explains that since we come to know the world through language, to know God *beyond* names requires silence that is best equated with ‘unknowing.’ In the words of Eckhart: “we must sink into oblivion and ignorance. In this silence, this quiet, the Word is heard. There is no better method of approaching this Word than in silence, in quiet: we hear it and know it alright in unknowing. To the one who knows nothing, it is clearly revealed.”⁵⁷ According to this approach, not only is mystical understanding beyond the grasp of language, it necessitates a stripping of meaning that is derived

⁵⁴ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, trans. Walters Clifton (Middlesex, England.: Penguin Classics, 1961), 66.

⁵⁵ Cited in: MacKendrick, *Immemorial Silence*, 89.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

through language. To let go of language is to ‘unknow’ and to be open to the myriad and ineffable forms of reality and God.

For some, spiritual experience is immediate and all-encompassing, and as such it cannot be constrained to a finite number of syllables and grammatical rules. In fact, recognizing the experience in words, even within one’s own mind, already mediates the experience, thus encompassing, restraining and altering it. Describing the experience to others is even more problematic, hence the preference for silence expressed by Meister Eckhart and a wide variety of mystical traditions. Another explanation for the inability to communicate mystical experience was given by Sogyal Rinpoche in his important book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Sogyal explains that mystical experience itself is simple and immediate just like looking at our own face and therefore cannot be conceptualized.⁵⁸ Kalamaras explains that mystical experience “speaks from the awareness of unification”⁵⁹ and when it is translated into a discourse bound by pervasive binaries it sounds inherently irrational and dualistic. The above explanations go hand in hand with our previous discussion on the tacit dimension. Since tacit knowledge is gained through subsidiary awareness and embodiment, it is felt as intuitive and holistic. Mystical understanding appears to be glimpses of focal awareness of what we usually have only subsidiary awareness of. This knowledge is tacit and holistic and therefore it is difficult to conceptualize it.

⁵⁸ Sogyal, Patrick Gaffney, and Andrew Harvey, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* ([San Francisco, Calif.]: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

⁵⁹ Kalamaras, *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension : Symbolic Form in the Rhetoric of Silence*, 7.

Aesthetic Appreciation

Aesthetic experience is often compared to spiritual experience in its ineffability and its quest for the IT—the extra meaning or ‘the beyond’ that is felt but cannot be easily conceptualized. Ben Nicholson references the works of George de La Tour, “As I see it, painting and religious experience are the same thing, and what we are all searching for is the understanding and realization of infinity.”⁶⁰ The famous artist Vassily Kandinsky suggests:

The spiritual life to which art belongs, and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex but definite movement above and beyond, which can be translated into simplicity. This movement is that of cognition. Although it may take different forms, it holds basically to the same internal meaning and purpose.⁶¹

Both the aesthetic and the religious are, in a sense, ends in themselves, and—in another sense—are means to further ends. Aesthetic appreciation or mystical realization are pursued as means for touching the beyond, but at the same time they are also the goal of art and religion. For Dewey “the consummatory orienting, and engendering character of the aesthetic in experience provides the most illuminating insight into the nature of the religious in experience.”⁶²

The term *aesthetics* is derived from the Greek *aisthetikos*, meaning “to feel or perceive through the senses.” The notion of perception and sensual reaction resulting from an encounter with a certain object (reality, art, etc.) are thus at the center of any discussion on aesthetics. Baumgarten was the first to coin the term *aesthetics* in the

⁶⁰ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 59.

⁶¹ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 26.

⁶² James Alfred Martin, *Beauty and Holiness : The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 117.

eighteenth century to designate a mindful appreciation of the beautiful or the sublime gained through the senses. He sought to create a discipline and a body of knowledge on aesthetics that would be compatible with other fields such as art and science.⁶³ Since then, the term has been used widely, but with little agreement about its exact meaning in scholarly or everyday discourse.⁶⁴ In accordance with Baumgarten's original intention, the term usually refers to the appreciation of beauty, form or proportion. As growing analyses of beauty made the meaning of the term more flexible, the focus of the definition of aesthetics has moved to the sensations derived from it—pleasure as well as awe or even pain. As Ronald Schenk observes, by the eighteenth century, “beauty came to refer to the capacity of things to evoke the inner experience of pleasure.”⁶⁵

According to Dewey, art has no ontological existence of its own or apart from the subject responding to it. The focus here is on perception and the subjective experience when confronted with the aesthetic object. Likewise, Schenk claims that aesthetic appreciation “is not just sensate perception, nor fantasy, but a combination of what we usually separate as inner and outer perception.”⁶⁶ Both cognitive processing and the object itself create the whole of the aesthetic experience. Since the focus of this dimension of the definition is experience, it allows us to break from conventional perceptions of beauty to include appreciation of the sublime—or even the distorted—as

⁶³ Mark Backman, *Sophistication : Rhetoric & the Rise of Self-Consciousness* (Woodbridge, Conn.: Ox Bow Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric of Machine Aesthetics* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999).

⁶⁵ Ronald Schenk, *The Soul of Beauty : A Psychological Investigation of Appearance* (Lewisburg [Pa.] London ; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1992), 101.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

valid possibilities of the aesthetic experience. This definition, according to Brummett, has a rhetorical potential since the appreciation of aesthetic experience can be learned and thus can be manipulated by the rhetor.⁶⁷ Cronkhite discusses aesthetics at the meeting point between research in rhetoric, psychology and biology. He explains the ways in which aesthetic reaction is concerned with neural impulses and their effect on the pleasure or aversive centers in the hypothalamus. These activating centers produce, in turn, involuntary physical responses such as increased muscle potential or tension. He sums up this discussion by suggesting that if this hypothesis is correct, aesthetic experiences “necessarily involve both cognitive and ‘emotional’ or affective elements.”⁶⁸

In line with the bodily understanding of aesthetic experience, George Steiner claims that the meaning of poetry and music are also of the human body: “The echoes of sensibility which they elicit are visceral and tactile.”⁶⁹ For this reason, criticism and writing on art inevitably lose something. Language is touched with materiality and as such, it cannot translate the more abstract and ineffable quality of art; “the best reading of art is art.”⁷⁰ Learning poems by heart, on the other hand, “afford the text this indwelling quality and life force.”⁷¹ He sides with Ben Johnson’s term “ingestion.” What we know by heart becomes an agent in our consciousness. The visceral experience gives way to a different form of knowing that belongs to the tacit dimension. For this reason, artists do not just engage in formal discussions on art. Rather, their important training requires

⁶⁷ Brummett, *Rhetoric of Machine Aesthetics*.

⁶⁸ Gary Cronkhite, "The Place of Aesthetics and Perception in a Paradigm of Interpretation," *Western Speech* 34, no. 4 (1970): 278.

⁶⁹ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

indwelling, such as copying masterpieces. As Tillich reminds us, another meaning of the term *aesthetics* is derived from *aisthanomai*, that is, “I am aware of something.” All of this shows the link between the cognitive and the aesthetic functions. “Both receive reality without changing it as such. They transform it into images, concepts, words, sounds, colors. But they do not transform the object as such...”⁷² While language inherently requires transformation of the object, cognition gained through the visceral aesthetic experience is immediate, intuitive and, at least to some extent, detached.

The concept of the sublime is especially relevant to our discussion of the ineffable and aesthetics. The term represents that which lies beyond a certain threshold, referring to “a certain superiority and preeminence in discourse.”⁷³ Hence, the sublime “transcends the human” and “uplifts our soul; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy.”⁷⁴ Sublimity is above and beyond lower human existence as it “carries one up to where one is close to the majestic mind of God.”⁷⁵ Especially in literature, explains Longinus, “we are looking for something that transcends the human.”⁷⁶ The goal of sublimity is to move beyond the senses and the rational into an uncontrolled *ekstasis*, a term used in ancient Greek to describe mental states beyond reason (logos.) Similar to drugs, sublime speech transports its audience, sweeping them off their feet.⁷⁷ The state of

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⁷³ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Benedict Einarson (Chicago: Parkard 1945), 4.

⁷⁴ ———, “On the Sublime,” in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers 2000), 365.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

the sublime is therefore very physical and is characterized by strong sensations related to the influence of drugs over the body and mind, or to spiritual inspiration.

The sublime was dealt with by Kant, who distinguished between the realm of the knowable (everyday empirical reality) and of the unknowable (the noumenal). We can have knowledge only of the empirical world around us, but not of the noumenal—which lies beyond the reach of the senses. The noumenal is the realm of things-in-themselves, rather than things as they appear to us through the senses. Since our knowledge is always mediated by the senses, we can never really know the noumenal and can only theorize and cogitate about it. Kant also theorized about a realm of the sublime, a concept that relates to divinity and the supernatural for which our concepts completely break down. Infinity, for example, belongs to the realm of the sublime because it lies beyond and differs from anything we can know directly; it thus eludes all including our imaginative capacities.⁷⁸

Building on Kant, Lyotard revives the concept of the sublime, thus bringing the presentation of the ineffable to center stage. For him, the task of the sublime is to paradoxically present the unrepresentable. He considers the ungraspable sublime as most appropriate for the post-modern condition which doubts the possibility of representation and is divorced from grand narratives and claims of truth or the real:

Postmodernism would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant and James Creed Meredith, *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.⁷⁹

However, because the sublime presents ideas that have no correlative in the natural world such as peace, equality, grandeur and freedom, the sublime cannot be represented but only evoked. The ineffable or the sublime, according to Lyotard, is not something to recognize, but is rather something that needs to be constantly evoked in order to present us with the end term of our “deaf desire” for limitlessness. How the ineffable can be evoked is a question I will try to answer in the following chapters of this dissertation.

Love

Another emotion that is often compared to the religious aspiration for unity and the ineffable is love. Being one of the most defining human experiences, love has been a major theme in art and in life itself. Like other forms of tacit knowledge, we can often recognize it through the body—the palpitating heart, the choked throat, and the fluttering “butterflies” in the stomach. Being so visceral and intuitive, love is often considered to be beyond the scope of language’s poor attempts to describe its intensity and greatness. In his article on love and rhetoric, Joshua Gunn opens with the lyrics of the famous love song *Islands in the Stream*. The opening words of the song, he comments, “are among the most stupid ever penned in the name of love: “Baby, when I met you there was peace unknown/I set out to get you with a fine tooth comb.” The stupidity, however, represent

⁷⁹ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature ; (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

for Gunn what love does for us: “it renders us dumb, it pushes us to the limits of representation, it pushes us almost to speechlessness.”⁸⁰

Mythology not only served spiritual writers when describing their mystical experience, but tales of love also often require a detour to symbolism and myths. In the famous Dialogue *The Phaedrus*, Plato must resort to myth in his discussion of love. He compares love to divine madness and provides detailed descriptions of divine places and beings such as the muses, the nymphs and winged horses as he pushes towards the threshold of language and the ecstatic feeling of love.⁸¹ In another important myth on love, Psyche is forbidden to look on her lover who visits her every night. When she tries to discover who he is by lighting his face with her candle as he sleeps, Cupid vanishes into the night. The myth of Cupid and Psyche reflects the paradoxical relation between love and language: the need to reveal it on the one hand and the inability to capture it on the other.

Tzvetan Todorov, writing about Constant's *Adolphe*, discusses the profound relation between language and desire. “Words imply the absence of things, in the same way that desire implies the absence of its object... words are to things what desire is to the object of desire...”⁸² Denis De Rougemont explains in his classic book *Love in the Western World* that myths of love are thus saturated with symbolism of death (as in Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet), war (love as a battle field), and the changing of the

⁸⁰ Joshua Gunn, "For the Love of Rhetoric, with Continual Reference to Kenny and Dolly," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 2 (2008): 132.

⁸¹ Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt college Publishers, 2000).

⁸² Peter Mudford, *Memory and Desire : Representations of Passion in the Novella* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 18.

seasons (another symbol of life and death).⁸³ As we shall see in the second chapter, the tension between exposure and secrecy, light and shadows, is inherent not only to love, but to all attempts to capture the ineffable. Disappearance or death is the ultimate symbol of the failure of the human desire to grasp the feeling and imprison it in words.

Pain

While love is still referred to by poets, few words can describe pain. “English,” writes Virginia Woolf, “which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver or the headache... The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.”⁸⁴ This limitation of language to describe pain was also referred to by the author Henry James, who, in the midst of World War I, wrote to the *The New York Times*: “One finds in the midst of all this as hard to apply one’s words as to endure one’s thought. The war has used up all words; they have weakened, they have deteriorated...”⁸⁵ The essential difficulty to describe pain is not exclusive to English, but afflicts all languages. In his book *As a Few Days*, The Israeli writer Meir Shalev describes the metaphors people retreat to when describing their pain and comments that pain has a special capacity to transform laymen into poets.

⁸³ Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, Rev. and augmented ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁸⁴ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain : The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

⁸⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 25.

One of the reasons provided by Elaine Scarry for the resistance of pain to language is its distinction from other states of mind. While other feelings are accompanied by objects in the external world, pain is always in and of itself. While we feel love or hunger for someone or something—or experience the fear of something—pain has no referential content. This explanation can also clarify the resistance of mystical experience to representation. Like pain, mystical experience in essence is detached and independent from external references. Pain itself is so ineffable that it is impossible to understand it separately from the medium causing it. Few people would have difficulty understanding Micheal Walzer’s troubled statement, “I cannot conceptualize infinite pain without thinking of whips and scorpions, hot irons and other people.”⁸⁶

Pain begins by being a consuming experience. At this stage it becomes the only subject of language. It monopolizes one’s existence and becomes a major source of self extension. “To feel pain” claims Scarry, is to have certainty; “to share it,” however, is to experience doubt. Pain is inherently so ineffable that it destroys language altogether. The experience of pain can be so total and consuming that it occupies the entire body and spills over into other parts of the being. It becomes so pervasive that it feels like the ‘single broad and omnipresent mode of existence.’⁸⁷ In stages of prolonged and acute pain, the body tends to interpret every sensation as pain. It becomes such a total experience that it becomes an exclusive mode of expression; thus, pain either becomes

⁸⁶ Scarry, *The Body in Pain : The Making and Unmaking of the World*, 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

inarticulated or it silences everything else.⁸⁸ Moreover, pain obliterates the contents of consciousness. It annihilates not only the objects of complex thoughts and emotion, but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception, consequently making pain even more resistant to language. . This inexpressibility of pain, Scarry argues, has important political consequences:

The failure to express pain—whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, since these attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body—will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation.⁸⁹

Despite the limits of language, pain is frequently evoked as a symbolic substitute for death in the initiation rites of many tribes. Scarry attributes the evocation of pain in relation to death to the ineffability of both. In their haunting presence in absence, in grotesque overload and abiding silence, pain and death are the most intense forms of negation which destroys not only the body, but also consciousness.⁹⁰

Summary

Pain, love, and mystical experience are experiences that are considered especially difficult to describe, yet these are not the only ineffable experiences. Briefly mentioned earlier, the sense of Self itself has become increasingly less substantial and more porous.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 31.

Consequently, transformative points in one's experience and sense of self are also becoming more ineffable. The 'awakening' experience is especially interesting since it involves a radical transformation—transfiguration even—of one's sense of self. It often originates from a place of deep pain, causing the death of the previous identity while creating a new one. If the ultimate secret of human existence is death, death is also the ultimate symbol of ineffability and the human failure to know the other side (of being, of language). Importantly, the study of awakening is the closest approximation of the study of the most ineffable of states and symbols—death and birth.

The question of the ineffable is the question of yearning for something we know, but cannot explicitly describe. As Philip Wheelwright suggests in his ruminations on "man's Threshold Existence," the human condition can best be described as fundamentally "liminal" in nature, as a suspended state of "radical incompleteness" where we are "always on the borderland of something more."⁹¹ According to this perspective, uncertainty and the promise for something beyond are the driving forces of our existence and in our texts. The topic of awakening that will be at the center of this research deals with the desire and the possibility to perfect oneself by attaining a higher state of physical and spiritual existence. This yearning for the transcendent refers here to actual experience as well as to the more elusive metaphorical ineffability that lurks in texts. Awakening from one state of being to another reaches beyond the edge that cannot be directly shared. And yet, it is talked about.

⁹¹ Philip Ellis Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain; a Study in the Language of Symbolism*, New and rev. ed. (Bloomington,: Indiana University Press, 1968), 18.

Awakening

In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke explains that “In the study of human motives, we should begin with complex theories of transcendence (as in theology and metaphysics) rather than with the terminologies of simplified laboratory experiment.”⁹² Thus, this dissertation deals with the term ‘awakening’ that belongs simultaneously to the realm of everyday affairs and metaphorically refers to a process of meaningful transformation. By ‘awakening’, I refer to a human experience in which one’s perspective and life style dramatically change. Awakening often begins with a visceral experience that is itself difficult to put into words. The shift in one’s experience to a different mode of awareness and being becomes more ineffable since it is inherently different from the previous ‘normal’ awareness and sense-of-self which is mediated by language.

Eugene Gendlin speaking about the *felt shift*- that transitional moment when and an old fixation lets go, bringing a new insight, release and a new direction. In his book *The Psychology of Awakening* John Welwood compares this *felt shift* to *satori*, the sudden awakening that is at the heart of Zen practice. In Zen stories (koans) a disciple is suddenly awakens as a result of “just watching a bird, being slapped by the teacher, or swapping the floor.”⁹³ This *satori* seemed like a major shift where one’s life transformed, leaving old patterns behind and becoming a new being.

⁹² Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion : Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 5.

⁹³ John Welwood, *Awakening the Heart : East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship*, 1st ed. (Boulder [New York]: Shambhala ; Distributed in the U.S. by Random House, 1983), 98.

In the field of spirituality the concept of awakening is also referred to by other terms such as conversion, regeneration, a change of heart, and tshuva. In this dissertation I understand awakening to be a meaningful change in one's perception of subjectivity and being in the world. The understanding entailed by awakening changes from one religious tradition to the other and would be contextualized and clarified in depth, in each of the analysis chapters.

What is entailed by 'Awakening'?

According to the Oxford dictionary, 'awaken' is "awake, rouse (a feeling)."⁹⁴ As soon as we look at the driest linguistic definition, the physical state of wakefulness is already inextricably linked to a state of mind [rouse (a feeling)]. In this definition, the adjective 'awakened' means *to be* 'awake,' to be in a state of wakefulness. This state of being (awake) is itself recognized only as an antonym to what we the readers are expected to assume to be a not wakeful state—sleep. Webster's dictionary gives a somewhat different definition: "awakening- The act of waking;" and examples follow suit:"it was an early awakening"⁹⁵; "it was the waking up he hated most" . In this definition, awakening stands for an act, a transition, yet it is not simply an activity. We are therefore left with the impression that 'awakening' is a transition between states of beings. Thus, the literal meaning of awakening already hints that the boundaries between passivity and activity, body and mind are not so clear. .

⁹⁴ "Askoxford," in *Oxford* (2008).

⁹⁵ Webster, "Awakening," <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/awakening>.

Kenneth Burke identifies four orders of words: those of the natural realm, those of the sociopolitical realm, words about words and words about the supernatural.⁹⁶ Since language is not suited to talk about the fourth realm—which is ineffable—we must borrow words from the other three realms that deal with everyday experience. Consequently, what has seemingly been a physical transition between dreams and wakefulness is used in the realm of the ineffable beyond. Thus ‘awakening’ is prevalent as a metaphor for describing change in a level of awareness and interaction with the world. We wake up from what is perceived to be the equivalent of a dream—usually, it is pejorative and refers to passivity, or a low level of awareness and interaction with the world—into a higher level of awareness and interaction. Thus, ‘awakening’ is inherently dualistic and suggests the existence of two distinct states of being. The starting point of awakening is the dream state, or the ‘not real’, which is inherently less grounded and more ineffable. The end point, or awakened awareness, is equated with reality, which is usually evaluated as a more positive state. Awakening entails a dramatic shift and the birth of another level of awareness. Therefore, the rhetorical impact of the metaphor of ‘awakening’ is more dramatic than what can be expected from a term that does not suggest duality but an ascending scale of awareness.

The metaphor of awakening is often referred to in religious and spiritual contexts, such as the story of the Buddha. The name or the adjective ‘Buddha’ literally means ‘awakened one.’ As the legend goes, the historical figure Siddhartha left his palace and his life as a prince to seek spiritual liberation. After years of practice with many yogis

⁹⁶ Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion : Studies in Logology*, 15.

across India, he sat down under a tree and was determined not to move until he realized the source of suffering and became liberated from it. For many hours Siddhartha sat in meditation, observing his mind and body, resisting the temptations and threats of demons. Fully determined, he did not react nor move. On the other side of the night, when the sun rose, Siddhartha was changed. He was no longer an ordinary being, having transformed into the Buddha, the awakened one. That is, during that sleepless night, he woke up from his previous state of delusion, craving and attachment. By looking into the deep roots of his suffering, he was able to let go of his previous conditioning and identification, liberating himself from suffering. Siddhartha's new name, the Buddha, was chosen in order to symbolize his new identity as an awakened and liberated being. Awakening refers to a radical transformation that can happen dramatically or incrementally in the perception of self and reality. When the consciousness no longer identifies with the personal, individual self and sees the unity of different forms of life and reality as it "really is" without judgment or projections, one is said to be 'awake.' Since Siddhartha's awakening experience, the title Buddha has been given to all those who followed the Buddha's path and 'woke up' to their "true" self and reality.

Imbued with metaphysical meaning, the metaphor of awakening can be loaned back to other linguistic realms. In politics for example, the Great Awakenings refer to several periods of dramatic religious revival in Anglo-American religious history that were also characterized as revolutionary periods in U.S history. They have also been described as periodic revolutions in U.S. religious thought . Here again, the state before the awakening implies a slumber or passivity during secular or less religious times. In

current Jerusalem, a new political movement by the name 'Hitorerut' (i.e., 'awakening') seeks to restore secular culture in the controversial city. Due to demographical and political changes Jerusalem changed its character, becoming more conservative and isolated. The political movement 'awakening' is interested in waking up the local population to the cultural implications of the current situation. If 'awakening' usually refers to greater religiosity, the political movement from Jerusalem uses the positive associations of the term to achieve the exact opposite - less religion and more secular culture. Historians are concerned with the factors that perpetuate these cultural revivals, but in rhetoric, it is the discursive construction and implications of awakening that concern us.

Awakening narratives often follow a narrative structure that is best described by Joseph Campbell in his classic work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.⁹⁷ The story begins with a departure, or a call. In illness stories, the symptoms function as the call that is often refused or ignored. When the call cannot be refused any longer, the hero goes beyond a threshold and moves to the second stage. The second stage is referred to by Frank as *initiation* and by Campbell as 'the road of trials.' As these names suggest, this stage can be identified by the physical and emotional suffering the hero experiences. The end of the journey brings what Campbell calls a "boon." The implication of this is that something is gained by the experience that should be shared with others. The final stage is the return, where the hero or the teller returns with new insights. The road entails trials

⁹⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Commemorative ed., Bollingen Series ; (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

and tribulations, but once a certain threshold is crossed, the suffering often culminates in transformation or awakening. Here, awakening entails a shift from a condition of physical pain and mental confusion to a different perception of life. The shift is sometimes accompanied by physical transformation and improved health. As in the previous examples, awakening implies a meaningful change that is ineffable. It is hard to conceptualize and put into words, yet it is so significant for those experiencing it that the need to share those lessons compels the ‘awakened’ ones to develop their modes of expression in their quest narratives.

In his monumental study on the research of religious experience, William James recognizes that the process of conversion (i.e., awakening) can happen either gradually or suddenly.⁹⁸ The term conversion is often used if the experience was sudden and especially if it happened as a result of a crisis. Usually, strong and explosive emotions give way to feelings of hope, happiness security, resolve and love. However, transformation in some cases can be gradual and experienced as a consistent building up of a new set of morals and ideals but even here the change becomes more rapid and extenuated at certain critical points

The relationship between emotional and physical transformation is reflected in many of the testimonies provided by James as well as in studies done by other researchers. In his research of religious healers, Csordas observed that the process of healing from pain requires not only the elimination of the pain, illness, or disorder, but a

⁹⁸ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

transformation of an entire being.⁹⁹ Likewise, when describing his horrendous experiences at the death camp, Victor Frankl—a psychiatrist and an Auschwitz survivor—refers to them as a type of emotional death.¹⁰⁰ Des Pres, who analyzed hundreds of testimonies of holocaust survivors, referred to it as a ‘subject-object’ split. This death of identity allows survivors to grow out of their emotional and physical pain.¹⁰¹

Awakening experience often implies the death of one state of being and the birth of another. This idea is reflected in various myths and rituals. In some cultures, the initiation rites of elected Shamans in which they change level or awareness or develop other extra-sensory perceptions are symbolized through death and suffering. The idea is that in order to attain a higher mode of existence, gestation and rebirth must occur. Sometimes the symbolism of the mystical agony, death and resurrection is conveyed in a brutal manner, aiming directly at the change of sensibility of the body. The Yagan Neophytes of Tierra del Fuego for example, rub their skin until the second or third skin appears. The old skin must disappear and give birth to a new radiant one. In the Caribs of Dutch Guiana, the apprentice shamans undergo a progressive intoxication of tobacco-juice and cigarettes. They massage their bodies with red liquid, and rub their eyes with

⁹⁹ Thomas J. Csordas, *Body/Meaning/Healing*, 1st ed., Contemporary Anthropology of Religion (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁰⁰ Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning; an Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1963).

¹⁰¹ Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor : An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

pimento juice before listening to their masters' lessons. Lastly, they dance upon tightropes at various heights and swing suspended in the air.¹⁰²

Many of the myths accompanying these rituals recount the adventures of heroes or shamans that had to die physically and not symbolically. Many myths feature a hero swallowed by a sea monster, later to be pulled from its belly, or a decent through a “*vagina dentate*” into the mouth of mother earth.¹⁰³ All these adventures are initiatory, and after them, the hero acquires a new mode of being. The “death” in these cases is related to a return to a basic origin and is equivalent to a new birth. A return to the origin has also served as a basic therapy model that attempts to return the patient to an original starting point in order to come to terms with hindrances and start anew.¹⁰⁴

Des Pres argues that Western tradition especially has come to equate suffering with spiritual depth and moral status with refinement of perception and sensibility. According to Des Pres, this belief is deeply rooted in the Western tradition and was shaped by different resources—the Christian belief in salvation through pain and Kierkegaard's emphasis on despair, as well as Nietzsche's emphasis on the abyss.¹⁰⁵ Other landmark thinkers in the Western tradition also formulated their own theories on the relationship between suffering and spiritual change. For Bataille, suffering can be

¹⁰² Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries; the Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (London,: Harvill Press, 1960).

¹⁰³ ———, *Myth and Reality*, [1st American ed. (New York,: Harper & Row, 1963), 81.

¹⁰⁴ Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries; the Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*.

¹⁰⁵ Des Pres, *The Survivor : An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*, 45.

more than pain and become a type of transfiguration¹⁰⁶ and Reich explains that the masochistic love for pain derives from hope for purging and transformation.¹⁰⁷

The Awakened Ones and the Birth of Language

Narratives of transformation and awakening are also characterized by an inward gaze and self-reflection that is especially interesting for us as rhetoricians. As mentioned earlier, returning to the origin is a form of rebirth and transformation, or in Mudford's terms: "memory is awakening."¹⁰⁸ Self narration is used in many types of therapies for dealing with grief and anxiety. For the sufferer, reliving the past is a way of coming to terms with the experience and sharing the insights acquired. When one becomes capable of writing down their stories and fashioning it into a narrative, the tale assumes a certain victory over and transcendence of the experience. The telling of the story recreates the experience, inevitably transforming it.¹⁰⁹ Especially because awakening experiences deal with the ineffable, they necessitate conceptualization of the visceral and the beyond. They force the writer to name their experience, and by doing thus, they in fact create it.

The connection between ineffability and the seemingly paradoxical sense of self that is formed at the same time is also expressed by Ulrich, the hero of Musil's important novel: *The Man Without Qualities*. In this book, Ulrich meditates on the common sentiment of the time – the failure of language to express what is most real—our "innermost being" to others. In one point in the book Ulrich explains, that there are

¹⁰⁶ Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality; a Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (New York,: Walker, 1962).

¹⁰⁷ Wilhelm Reich, *Character Analysis*, 3d, enl. ed. (New York,: Farrar, 1972).

¹⁰⁸ Mudford, *Memory and Desire : Representations of Passion in the Novella*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

moments when “one becomes oblivious of sight and hearing, and quite loses the power of speech. And yet, it’s precisely then, one feels, that one comes to oneself for a moment.”¹¹⁰

Awakening experiences are hard to put into words not only because they entail an important change but also because the experience is often accompanied by a sense of newness as well as by unconscious physical symptoms (i.e., convulsions, visions, involuntary vocal utterances) and/or intense emotions such as joy, love, and awe.¹¹¹ If, as some poststructuralists suggest, people come to know their world through acts of language, then relinquishing this capacity without other modes of expression can lead to debilitating meaning-making consequences.

In her study of trauma Cathy Caruth suggests that Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, Caruth claims, because both literature and psychoanalysis are interested in the relation between knowing and not knowing. The juxtaposition between the crying voice and the unknowing of the repetition compulsion of the traumatic experience moves the plot and the hero’s transformation. What the parable of the wound and the voice tell us, Caruth claims, is that trauma is more than pathology:

it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Cited in: Mendes- Flohr, "Intorduction," xxi.

¹¹¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 274-84.

¹¹² Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

Drawing on both Western psychology and Eastern traditions (particularly, Zen Buddhism and Dzogchen) John Welwood describes a process of awakening or transformation that addresses the ‘woundness’ that put people on the spiritual and psychological paths. He describes a three stages process of transformation that begins with a widening attention to a global feeling of a situation; continues with a direct inquiry into the nature of that sense; and culminates by articulating it from various angles, discovering its crux and releasing its stuckness.”¹¹³ Each act of articulation demystifies the cloud out of which the initial sensations arose and have a transformative effect when they resonate with the feelings, thus allowing them to unfold. According to that approach, formulating the ineffable feelings into language ignites and shapes the process of awakening and transformation.

In her study of the unmapped territory of creative knowledge, Claire Petitman-Peugeot researched the experience of intuition in the production of knowledge.¹¹⁴ To explore the intuitive experience, the author carried out a series of interviews particularly designed to access pre-thought. A generic structure of the intuitive experience emerged from this work, one of which was the description of moments of availability to the spontaneous production of knowledge which were experienced as a break in the usual manner of looking at the world. In the process of interviewing, it was found that several of the subjects had difficulties to live (or relive) an intuitive experience and

¹¹³ Welwood, *Awakening the Heart : East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship*, 94.

¹¹⁴ Claire Petitmengin-Peugeot, "The Intuitive Experience," in *The View from Within : First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness*, ed. Francisco J. Varela and J. Shear (Thorverton, UK ; Bowling Green, OH: Imprint Academic, 2000).

simultaneously put it into words. Thus the interview was conducted as a succession of periods to allow the mind to process the information. In each session the interviewer asked specific details about the context in which the experience took place thus encouraging the unconscious contemplation. Silent reflection revealed the researchers that the subject was indeed pondering the question rather than answering a scripted answer. Time intervals and silent meditation were therefore necessary tools in the retrieval of memory and the transformation of tacit experience into a conceptual one.

Therefore, in testimonies of awakening we witness the acquisition of new modes of being and novel ways of expression. The authors must respond to the challenges of the ineffable by inventing new ways of meaning-making and expression. Kawin explains “author, text, and readers participate in the creation of meaning and confront the limits of their level of awareness in response to the challenges of the ineffable...opening to the ineffable is an experience not of vacuity of something recognized as irreducibly authentic.”¹¹⁵ But as Caruth suggests, what remains unaddressed in those narratives, is a part of the story and can convey as much as words.¹¹⁶

More than any other narratives or texts dealing with the ineffable, awakening confront the writers and readers with the limitations of being and language as well as the desire to transcend them. As the gaze turns inside and the limitations are overcome, we witness not only physical and psychological change, but also the birth of language. The mute narrator regains a voice in the process of transformation. Narratives of awakening

¹¹⁵ Kawin, *The Mind of the Novel : Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable*, xii.

¹¹⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative, and History*.

dip into the most visceral experiences of transformation at the same time that they evoke the ineffable of the beyond. Research that deals with the ineffable and the rhetorical construction of awakening can teach us of the possibilities of expression afforded by language and the body. Most importantly, it can teach us what it means to be human and what having a voice entails.

Research Questions

Since awakening is a visceral and ineffable transformation that happens to both minds and bodies and can culminate in annihilation of one's sense of being—we must wonder how it can be communicated through words which are purely mental constructs. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on language and the rhetoric of awakening in the context of three different religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Zen.

The main question of this study is therefore: what is the rhetoric of the ineffable?

Other related questions are:

What are the connections between expression and experience?

In what ways is the rhetorical tradition in accord with the ways in which the narrators construct their awakening narrative?

Methodology

The method used in this dissertation is close textual analysis of the awakening narratives in the context of each religious and rhetorical tradition. As Bakhtin explains in *The Dialogic Imagination*, meaning never happens in a vacuum as an isolated event, but can instead be found in a context of dynamic and dialogic relationship with multiple factors.¹¹⁷ The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically shape one another. Historical, social, economic and even meteorological factors come together to create what he calls “heteroglossia.” Language, however, is not only shaped by these factors but in return also affects them, weaving a dynamic and

¹¹⁷ Mikail. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson, University of Texas Press Slavic Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

interdependent constellation. Since language is inherently dialogic and perpetually changes, it cannot be grasped as a unitary and closed system, and instead can be understood only in terms of its relationship to the multiple forces that it is in relationship with.

Each analysis chapter therefore contains a review of the rhetoric of each tradition. Language as a mode of communication is addressed both at the level of a word and the more general perception of language (i.e., mimetic or constitutive). Each chapter attends to the problem of ineffability and the understanding of awakening in each tradition. Analysis of the texts follows suit, focusing on the rhetorical tropes and the rhetorical moves taken by the writers to construct their awakening experience. Attention to the correspondence between the rhetorical tradition and the ways in which experience is constructed receives particular attention, as does the political and ideological agenda that participate in the meaning making process.

Since the rhetoric of awakening need to be attuned to the subtleties of the text, the texts analyzed were written in two languages spoken by me: English and Hebrew. To better understand the depth of texts written in Latin and Japanese I used secondary resources. ¹¹⁸

The Texts

The first text belongs to the Jewish tradition and more specifically the awakening experience of Martin Buber. The main text to be analyzed in this chapter is titled 'The

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Turning of the Heart" from his anthology *Meetings*.¹¹⁹ Other autobiographical accounts, interviews he gave and stories written by him would serve to illuminate the primary chapter and elaborate on the rhetoric of awakening in his testimonies.

The analysis chapter deals with awakening in the context of Christianity. The texts used are the awakening of Paul from the New Testament, *The Confessions St. Augustine*,¹²⁰ *The Memoires of Charles G. Finney*¹²¹ and Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*¹²². Other texts written by these writers would also be addressed to illuminate the awakening experience each writer went through.

The last analysis chapter addresses the rhetoric of awakening in Zen. Awakening testimonies of eight students provided by Kapleau in *The Three Pillars of Zen*¹²³ were analyzed in light of Zen rhetoric.

¹¹⁹ Martin Buber, *Meetings* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Pub. Co., 1973).

¹²⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. Edward. B Pusey (New York: The Modern Library, 1949).

¹²¹ Charles Grandison Finney, Garth Rosell, and Richard A. G. Dupuis, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney : The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1989).

¹²² Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 50th anniversary ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

¹²³ Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, [1st U.S. ed. (New York,: Harper & Row, 1966).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW—FROM REPRESENTATION TO CO-CREATION

The most provocative hypothesis concerning ineffability is that it is present everywhere in language. According to this approach, ineffability is the essence of language; the mysterious is present in every mundane transaction, that is, in everyday experiences. “If this is true” claims Frank,

Then the investigation of the topos of “what cannot be said” in some of its more dramatic and spectacular forms might be expected to illuminate a pervasive dimension of all experience and consciousness in language. What is made awesomely manifest in the heroes of metaphysical questions and in protagonists responding to supernatural vocations or divine visions is perhaps, albeit in lesser degrees, true for all of us and true even at the level of collective endeavors. The impossible quest to articulate the ineffable may be always implicitly there already in some form in any articulation whatever that breaks the silence.¹

Since ‘ineffability’ assumes the end limits of representation, and since the ‘rhetoric of ineffability’ pretends to be able to circumvent this problem, or aporia—this chapter must lay the groundwork by examining some preliminary definitions, namely the notion of ‘representation’ and the supposition that words can ‘stand for’ and represent (or fail to represent) things in the world. Accordingly, this chapter will explore the notion of ‘representation,’ especially as it relates to subjectivity. It will trace the different perspectives from Antiquity to the present crisis of representation and the corresponding view that language is constitutive and, hence, inherently rhetorical. Last, I will discuss the idiom of haunting as a framework for investigating ‘presence in absence,’ a perspective useful for discussing that which cannot be discussed—both on the level of language and on the metaphysical level of self and transformation.

¹ Arthur Frank, "Varieties and Valences of Unsayability," *Philosophy and literature* 29, no. 2 (2005): 113.

Representation

What is meant by ‘representation’? Can words represent things? Can the terms designated for the ‘self’ and things in the world or for abstract notions such as ideals, ‘truth’ and ‘presence’ stand for them? The relation between language and reality is central to any rhetorical inquiry. As such it occupied orators and thinkers throughout the ages. According to Postgate,

There have been no questions, which have caused more heart searching, tumults, and devastation than that of the correspondence of words to facts. The mere mention of such words as religion, ‘patriotism,’ and ‘property’ are sufficient to demonstrate this truth. Now, it is the investigation of the nature of the correspondence between word and fact, to use these terms in the widest sense, which is the proper and the highest problem of the science of meaning.²

The term ‘representation’ is rather modern, and it is impossible to find an exact equivalent for it in ancient Greek philosophy. Volli suggests calling representation the act of ‘*standing for*’ since according to the prevalent understanding of the term ‘representation,’ it is seen as a product of cognitive activity, a process by which someone extracts meaning from *something* about the world.³ A representation is therefore not only a copy or a duplicate but a cognitive process in which symbols become associated with other things.⁴ Volli explains that representation thus derives from the empiricist idea of cognition as a type of mirroring and as an activity that involves matching thoughts with things in the world through symbols (mostly linguistic but also visual). Representation therefore assumes distinction between form and content and expects some equivalence

² K. Charles. Ogden and I.A Richards, "The Meaning of Meaning," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000), 705.

³ Ugo Volli, "Crisis of Representation, Crisis of Representational Semiotics?," *Semiotica* 143, no. 1-4 (2003).

⁴ Barry Brummett, *The World and How We Describe It* (2003), 4.

between them. This referential way of looking at the world is engrained in Western thought which divides language and the world into subject-object; words- the world, and so on. It relies on an ontological paradigm that Derrida has referred to as the ‘metaphysics of presence.’

The metaphysics of presence assumes that ‘things’ have an objective existence and a stable identity that can be located and captured in words. Deleuze uses the notion of ‘difference’ to explain this ontological worldview and the primacy of identity as its organizing principal. Difference cannot be conceived as an independent concept since things can be understood as different only by comparing them to one another. In other words, the analytic category of difference depends on the assumption that things have distinct and recognized identities and thus it becomes the organizing principal of representation.⁵ However, according to Deleuze and Bradford, the notion of difference has not always been dependent on the primacy of identity but has developed over time in the Western tradition. In the following pages I trace the history of representation as dictated by conceptions of identity and the primacy of origins. I begin with Plato up to Foucault’s archeological exploration of language in western thought, a move that will prefigure my discussion of the current crisis of representation.

Plato: Language as Ontology

Gadamer explains that this instrumental concept of the word banished knowledge “to the intelligible sphere, so that ever since in all discussion on language, the concept of

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Bradford Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*, Suny Series in Communication Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

the image (*eikon*) has been replaced with that of the sign (*semeia*).” Gadamer explains that this was “not just a terminological change, but it expresses an epoch-making decision about thought concerning language⁶.” According to this view, words or signs function not as entities but as pointers towards other things. Susan Handelman argues that underneath this understanding of language is the Platonic ontology.⁷ For Plato, language belongs to the realm of the imperfect and contingent, while true knowledge is possible only in the realm of the immutable forms. The movement of inquiry was accordingly from word to thing to form. Being must be studied not through language—which like all imperfect things must be transcended—but from within itself. This view would be further developed (as we shall see in Chapter four) by St. Paul and St. Augustine and would lead to a mimetic understanding of language that is based on identities and representation. The Christian mystics would ultimately prefer the transcendence of language and textuality through silence and ineffability which were understood to be signs of the original presence.

Plato’s *Cratylus* is considered one of the most important texts in the history of linguistics. In this text, Cratylus and Socrates debate the essence of representation: whether words are “natural,” or “conventional,” that is, whether they contain an innate truth or are assigned meaning through common agreement. The solution offered in the dialogue is that words (*onoma* which in Greek is synonymous with a name), are instrumental signs not for things but for the form of things. Plato’s distinction between

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 374.

⁷ Susan A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, Suny Series on Modern Jewish Literature and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

the ideal world of forms and their imitation is at the heart of Western philosophy and the representative model with which philosophers debate to this day. Sallis ascribes the beginning of Western metaphysics in ontological terms that he calls the ‘Socratic turn.’⁸ The turn becomes explicit in the *Phaedrus* when Socrates explains the decisive stage that set him on his path. After repeated failures investigating things as they were done in the past, that is, through a “direct method of investigation which would proceed to explain certain things by referring them directly to other things,”⁹ Socrates decides to turn to an indirect method of investigation, a technique which he compares to the process of studying things in an image rather than looking at them directly. To do this, Socrates uses ideals such as the beautiful, the good, and the great as the foundation for his investigations. Hence, “the Socratic turn consists in the opening of the difference between immediately, sensibly present things and those that would be their foundation—or, more precisely and literally, those in which the sheer unobstructed look of things would be had.”¹⁰ Although the turn appears analogous to the movement from things (originals) to images of those things, it is in fact, emphasizes Sallis, different. The Socratic turn is not from original to images but is reversed—from immediately present things to their originals. This focus shifts from the immediately present and fragmented phenomena to the attempts to find them in their originary and ideal presence. The Socratic turn therefore

⁸ John Sallis, *Delimitations : Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, 2nd, expanded ed., Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

“constitutes the field of metaphysics as a field of presence and metaphysics itself as the drive for presence.”¹¹

This ontological perspective is at work, according to Sallis, in many of the Platonic dialogues. The most famous of such renditions is the metaphor of the cave from the *Republic*, a book in which the cave dwellers learn to distinguish between the shadow and its original form. This pattern is present also in other less obvious descriptions. Sallis gives the example of the escaped prisoner from the *Republic*. When emerging from the cave to the open space, the prisoner prepares to lift his gaze from the earth to the heaven by looking at his reflection, for example, as he is reflected in pools of water.¹² The schema represented in the cave constitutes the field of metaphysics as a dyadic relationship between image and original. The idea of representation in language is related to this dyad relation—of original presence and its identifiable reflection. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains that “one must know the truth of the subject by isolating it in definition until you reach the limit of division.”¹³ The goal of Western metaphysics therefore becomes locating this origin in its ideal identity.

Bradford Vivian suggests that “this metaphysical obsession with origins indicates an equal desire for fruition. Metaphysical reflection, he claims, begins by fixing a singular focus upon its desired end.”¹⁴ The metaphysical beliefs in ideal forms and originary presence not surprisingly lend themselves to religious applications. This is

¹¹ Ibid., 6.b

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*, 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., 26.

famously reflected in Heidegger's and Derrida's descriptions of Western ontology as "ontheo-theological." By inquiring into the origin of man and ideal forms of being, one is led to consider the existence of the quintessential and even divine ideal being or God qua God. The beginning of human beings thus assumes a certain progression and fruition to some kind of after life beyond the sensible phenomena of present reality. Thinking of the category of being in this manner, according to Derrida, leads to a search for the metaphysical unity of man and God, suggesting that the project of becoming God constitutes human reality."¹⁵ Since the category of being necessitates the possibility of origins and *telos*, it is imperative to inquire how 'awakening' as a process of personal transformation relies on this world view.

Aristotle: Words and Things

Aristotle follows Plato in his understanding of language as representative and ontological. In the beginning of the *De Interpretatione* Aristotle states what has come to be known as one of the most influential assertions in the history of semantics:¹⁶

Now spoken sounds are symbols of affection in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what they are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likeness of—actual things—are also the same.¹⁷

Although Aristotle does not explain the nature of signification in language in depth, he does refer to words as signs pointing to 'actual' things on the basis of likeness. As W.D.

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 116.

¹⁶ Norman Kretzmann, "Aristotle on Spoken Sound Significant by Conversation," in *Ancient Logic and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. John Corcoran (Dordrecht, Netherland and Boston: D. Reidel, 1974), 3.

¹⁷ Aristotle *De Interpretatione* 1.16a3-8. Cited in: Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

Ross points out, judgment is established on making connections between these affections of the soul rather than between things in reality. Judgments are therefore syntheses of concepts, which are true only to the extent that they are *like* the connections or separations of associated elements of reality. Ross criticizes this view in which things themselves are involved in logical operation.¹⁸

Similarly to Plato, Aristotle's view of language is based on convention and likeness. Aristotle distinguishes here between the real things, which are the passions of the soul, and their imitation. Consequently, division between different types of discourse is established. Scientific proof does not deal with verbal discourse but with real things which are the affections of the soul which image things. McKeon explains that this leads Aristotle to construct an "outer" discourse and an "inner" discourse.¹⁹ The inner discourse deals with mental experiences, the passions of the soul; the outer discourse is expressed in sound and symbolizes these passions. While the outer discourse is achieved by convention, the inner discourse is considered "natural" and shared by all man. The connection between the different types of discourse—things and words—is again, based on likeness. At the heart of this is the separation not only between the things themselves and words, but also the perceived superiority of speech over writing. Handelman describes it as "the antiviral—or, better, anti-Scriptural tendency of Greek thought."²⁰ Consequently, Aristotle followed Plato in separating the fields of rhetoric and poetics—in

¹⁸ W. D. Ross. "Aristotle." (Place Published: Routledge, 1995.) Cited in: Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 10.

¹⁹ Richard McKeon, "Aristotle's Conception of Language and the Arts of Language," in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R.S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952), 187-88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

which words and things are intricately interrelated—from “true science,” logic, and philosophy. The underlying implication throughout has been that truth and falsity belong to thoughts rather than to words. This profoundly influential separation was challenged in Western thought with more current understandings of language as operating under logic of its own and as able to construct reality.

In her discussion of Aristotle, Handelman emphasizes that both Plato’s and Aristotle’s understandings of language had emerged from thinking of language in terms of mathematics and geometry. This had profound implications for their reflections on text, truth, and meaning.²¹ Aristotle, however, disagreed with Plato’s theory of forms, claiming that it confused them with substances capable of independent existence. For Aristotle, only primary substance is capable of independent existence, and anything falling under another category is dependent. Consequently, Aristotle replaced Plato’s forms with categories, in which he classified the types of being in terms of ten predicates: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, situation, state, motion, and passivity. Gadamer notes that Aristotle’s categories reorient the forms of being to forms of assertion—the relation between a subject and a predicate as either something that “is” or “is not” something else.²² In doing so, he creates a restricted logic based on classes rather than propositions. Rather than describing relations as propositions, it describes relations between predicates that make up propositions.²³ According to Handelman, this

²¹ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 6-10.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 423-4.

²³ Tzvetan Todorov, "On Linguistic Symbolism," *New Literary History* 6 (1974). In: Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

ontological view of language has led to a restriction of dialectics and argumentation. As we shall see in the analysis chapter of Christianity it also led to a particular understanding of ineffability and awakening as ontological.

Ultimately, despite the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle, both see words as representative and as having an ontological basis. As Handelman shows, for both, the linguistic is not the realm of truth; meaning and knowing are therefore contingent on the movement beyond discourse, *beyond* talking.²⁴ As changes in modes of discourse and thinking gradually developed, challenges to the representational model of language arose, Foucault's brilliant analysis of Western thought and modes of discourse illuminates the ways in which changes in the representative model have come about.

The Crisis of Representation

In *The Order of Things*,²⁵ Michel Foucault investigates the discursive history of representation from the sixteenth century onward. Rather than presenting an overarching ontology, Foucault is interested in mapping the discursive patterns that changed 'the order of things.' By closely looking at the ways in which people talk about topics such as labor, and life, or the ways in which knowledge and experience were organized in those fields which came to be known as biology and linguistics – Foucault is able to expose the constructed nature of some taken-for-granted ways of thinking. For him, the differences in modes of discourse indicate 'tacit' discursive rules that govern what people in a certain

²⁴ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 7.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

society can or cannot think about. Therefore, he demonstrates the ways in these discursive patterns necessitate changes in understandings of subjectivity, and knowledge itself. By noting the changes in patterns of discourse and the consequent changes in ways of thinking, we can see how the representative model of language has gradually morphed into the current crisis in representation and the understanding of language as constitutive.

Foucault's 'archeological inquiry' reveals two discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture: the first marks the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Classical Age (roughly half way through the seventeenth century.) The second shift, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, marks the beginning of the Modern Age. According to Foucault, the organizing principal during the Renaissance is *similitude*. Put differently, words do not mirror things in the world but rather participate in an endless process of reflection. During the Classical Age, or Enlightenment, order, rather than similitude, becomes the organizing principal and is based on identity and difference. Language, no longer intertwined with things in the world, is distinct from them and is expected to accurately represent them. In the Modern Age, inquiry attempts to find the inner nature of things; consequently, language and man become the object of investigation. No longer seen as simply representative, language is gradually taken to be constitutive. In the next pages I summarize Foucault's analysis of the discursive patterns during these periods in order to illuminate the ways in which the status of language changed and the how these changes enabled different ways of acquiring knowledge and understanding subjectivity.

Resemblance

Language in the Renaissance did not represent but reflected reality as words and things in the world were not yet considered distinct. The organizing and constructive principle of knowledge during this time is based on expectations of resemblance. Whether in language or art, phenomena was represented according to the principal of similitude: symbols were “a form of repetition: the theater of life or the mirror of nature.”²⁶ The semantic possibilities of resemblance encompassed four main forms: *conventia*, *emulation*, *analogy* and *sympathies*. *Conventia* refers to the juxtaposition of things, making them similar by creating links between things in the world. The second form of similitude, *emulation*, is free from space and able to function from a distance as things can imitate remote things in the universe. Foucault gives the example of the human face that can emulate the sky from afar. While man’s intellect is an imperfect reflection of God’s wisdom, so his two eyes and other facial features emulate the stars.²⁷ The third form is *analogy*. This old concept is now extended and receives renewed force as things can now be freed from space but still be talked about in terms of adjacencies and bonds. Relations can be found between things such as plants and the soil, living beings and the globe they inhabit, sense organs and the face in which they are situated, etc. The fourth form is the play of *sympathies*, a principle of mobility that serves to connect a variety of things in the world. Despite the varying levels of abstraction, all the above forms organize ideas and things in the world based on expectations for resemblance and connections between seemingly disparate things.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

Due to the organizing principle of similitude and reflection on its various forms, things remained identical.²⁸ In the Renaissance, one resemblance echoed another larger resemblance in an endless process of the mirroring of objects and their shadows. Language was also taken to mirror the world that in turn reflects another original presence. Consequently, language was viewed as a perpetual commentary, attempting to decipher the signs; the poet was the one who was able to interpret the underlying connections between things that on the surface level appear to be distinct.²⁹ Knowledge, then, was based on a continuous process of interpretation which necessitates that discrete identities of things and the ways in which they reflect each other refer back to a larger form of resemblance and similitude. One can recognize the *signature*, the evidence of the form of similitude taking place, as distinct from the actual phenomena. The signature formed ‘another resemblance;’ while exposing the existence of one form of similitude it exposed the existence of another adjunct resemblance, thereby creating a “sliding chain of similitudes.”³⁰

It is important to emphasize Foucault’s point that words are not necessarily imperfect or inadequate—but language and vision are always the reflection of something else, nothing can be reduced to other terms. In Foucault’s reference to the painting of the *Maninas*, and the ways in which the thing we see never resides in our seeing or saying, he notes, “it is in this vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying: the space where they achieve their splendor is not that

²⁸ Ibid., 16-15.

²⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁰ Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*, 41.

deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential element of syntax.”³¹ The organizing principle of ‘resemblance’ will gradually change to ‘order’ thus marking the shift to the next episteme and a representative model of language.

Order

Within a few years, similitude ceases to be the organizing principal of knowledge. The focus of resemblance is now frowned upon and only games that expose the illusory nature of the senses are left—this is the time of optic illusions, *tramps d’œil* paintings, dreams, and visions. The poetic dimension of language is henceforth defined by metaphor, simile, and allegory. Foucault gives the example of the Cartesian critique of resemblance as an example of a typical Enlightenment (Classical) idea. The critique differs from sixteenth-century thought that was troubled by the endless contemplation of familiar forms. Rather, it “excludes resemblance as a fundamental experience and primacy of knowledge.” In turn, “knowledge must be analyzed in terms of identity, difference, measurement and order.”³²

Instead of resemblance we now have two forms of comparison: the comparison of measurement and that of order but with the imbalance that it is always possible to reduce problems of measurement to that of order. Unlike calculation, which proceeds from part to whole, in measurement one proceeds from a whole and divides it into separate parts. Since the comparison of two units, or two multiplicities, requires that they both be analyzed according to a common unit, the comparison of measurement is reducible to the

³¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 52.

arithmetic relations of equality and inequality. Measurement thus enables us to analyze things according to the forms of identity and difference(s).³³ Order on the other hand, is established without connection to an external unit. The nature of things is found by discovering the simplest elements it arranges differences according to the smallest degree possible.

The measures are therefore determined based on equality and inequality and they progress to serial arrangements from the simplest to the more complex based on identity and difference. The change from resemblance, which was for a long period of time the organizing principal of knowledge, into an analysis based on identity and difference had a profound effect on Western thought and perceptions of language, according to Foucault. The empirical domain—which in the sixteenth-century was based on kinships and relations and in which language was endlessly interwoven into things—was reconfigured. Unlike previous efforts to draw things together and create connections between them, Enlightenment thought attempted to discriminate and establish identities would ultimately be organized into a series.³⁴

While during the Renaissance, signs and phenomena were intertwined in a process of resemblance; during the Enlightenment they were separated and “the sign [was] no longer bound to what is perceived to be solid resemblance and affinity.”³⁵ Foucault notes that from the seventeenth-century onward, “the domain of the sign is divided between the certain and the probable: there can be no longer an unknown sign

³³ Ibid., 53.

³⁴ Ibid., 55.

³⁵ Ibid., 58.

until there exists a *known* possibility of substitution between two *known* elements.”³⁶ If previously, knowledge required the opening up of existing relations of a language given by God; from the seventeenth century on, the sign performs its signifying function from within language. Although God was still perceived as that which employs signs, He was thought to make use of the relations set up in our minds between impressions to create the process of signification. The form of the sign also changed: in the Renaissance, the sign could triumph over space and time for it brought phenomena together by the process of similitude. Later, however, the sign came to be seen as either a part of what it claims to represent or separated from it. The arbitrary nature of natural language was replaced by renewed appreciation for man-made signs as these were seen as more functional. The system of signs was considered an absolutely transparent language, capable of naming and defining things in all their complexity.³⁷

Foucault emphasizes that it is the sign system that introduced the search for calculability, origins, and the ordering of things according to the simplest elements. It linked all knowledge to language and sought to replace all languages with a system of artificial signs and logical operations. The dissociation of the sign and resemblance in classical thought is what made probability, analysis, combination, and universal language possible. It is not merely the new theories of Hobbes, Berkley, and Leibnitz that shaped the Enlightenment mindset, emphasizes Foucault, rather, it was the new sign system that

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

³⁷ Ibid., 58-63.

enabled these philosophies to emerge. Knowledge was based on rationalism, and scientific thought began to develop.³⁸

Language in the Classical age was both preeminent and unobtrusive. It was preeminent because words can still represent things but representation was no longer translation, giving a visible form of something else in order to reproduce an exact thought. Rather, language represented thought as thought represented itself. During this period it was thought that everything could be represented, and every word is the exact representation and duplication of something else that is not its equivalent. Words do not duplicate thought but recall it and indicate it. Language thus expresses things but it is not parallel to them. In the Renaissance, language had been hidden and had not yet appeared in the order of signification. To some degree, explains Foucault, language was eliminated from the seventeenth century since it no longer “appears hidden in the enigma of the mark,” yet it had not yet appeared in the theory of signification. Language at this time had no other role than that of signification.³⁹ An example of this line of thinking can be found in John Locke’s work. Although he was one of the first to reject the balance between words and reality, Locke still believed in the primacy of ideas over words and the possibility of perfect understanding. Operating from within the dualistic and functionalist approach of his time, he believed that thoughts precede language and hence language should reflect ideas. Consequently, Locke’s goal was to purify and sterilize

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 78-9.

language in order to maximize an accurate reflection of the external reality to ourselves and to others.⁴⁰

The movement from a model of language that reflects reality to one that represents reality enabled the shift from commentary to criticism. Once discourse becomes the object of language, the goal is no longer to repeat what was already said, but to understand the way it functions and what enables it to achieve its representative role. Criticism, therefore, develops, but since language is perceived as representative, criticism could only analyze language in terms of truth, precision, appropriation or excessive value. Discourse is judged as true or false, transparent or opaque, and accurately representative or not. This type of criticism has led, in turn, to the growing distinction between form and content. It was then that the need to build a perfectly transparent and analytic language arose with the rejection of words that fail to do so. The rhetorical analysis of syntax and tropes also emerged here as an analysis of the proper way to represent things. Criticism of religious texts became more popular and although their figures and images were analyzed the goal was still to understand their truth value.⁴¹

The Death of God and the Appearance of Man

During the Renaissance, signs mirrored phenomena, and representation functioned in its purest form. During the Enlightenment, representation was still at the heart of linguistic understanding, but the connection between the sign and the

⁴⁰ John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Harcourt Publishers, 2000). Barry Brummett, "An Introduction to John Locke," in *Reading Rhetorical Theory*, ed. Barry Brummett (Harcourt College Publishers, 2000).

⁴¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things : An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, 78-85.

phenomenon was no longer intertwined in an endless series of reflection and distinction between content and form emerges. Phenomena began to be classified based on their manifestation, and critical writing examined texts according to their truth value and accuracy of reflections. However, until the nineteenth-century, analysis of language did not change much and words were analyzed based on their ability to represent as well as their ability to come as close as possible to some original form.⁴²

In the Modern Age understanding of language and knowledge changed once again. During the Enlightenment things were classified according to their innate identity, but nineteenth-century inquiry developed methods for revealing the inner nature of things. Until the end of the eighteenth-century, language was looked at as discourse, as “the spontaneous analysis of representation.”⁴³ However, in the nineteenth century these representative contents were no longer analyzed according to their relation to an absolute origin. From the nineteenth century on, analysis began to focus on understanding the inner nature of things, and *human* become the ones who assign signification and representation for a rational and empiricist goal. By the nineteenth-century, more parameters for analyzing languages had developed; the mechanisms, grammar, and sounds of each language were analyzed individually and in relation to other languages so as to expose their inner logic, or the “behind-the-scenes world.”⁴⁴ Unity was still thought to exist behind the former transparency of representation, now conceived of as an indicator of the more profound inner nature of things. The visible manifestation of these

⁴² Ibid., 233.

⁴³ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 239.

recognized identities were now linked with organic mechanisms and the inner laws operating them. Foucault explains that if in the Classical Age language had grammar because it had the ability to represent, in the nineteenth-century the order is reversed and language represents *because of* that grammar.⁴⁵

In the nineteenth-century language began to assume its constitutive value. Man believed himself to be the master of speech but was not aware of the fact that historical dimension and the rules of discourse were enabling his particular form of speech. Language at this time assumed the enigmatic quality it had had during the Renaissance, not due to a transcendent origin ‘buried in it,’ but because grammar and syntax were disturbed so as to expose the words that enabled philosophies. Now, myths were dissipated and the elements of silence each discourse carries within it were rendered more audible.⁴⁶ Foucault gives the example of *Das Capital* as an exegesis of value; Nietzsche as an exegesis of a few Greek words, and Freud, as the exegesis “of all those unspoken phrases that support and at the same time undermine our apparent discourse, our fantasies, our dreams, our bodies.” Foucault then emphasizes that Language, or “Philology, as the analysis of what is said in the depths of discourse, has become the modern form of criticism.”⁴⁷

Before the nineteenth-century, man saw himself as the one for whom representation exists, the one who ties it all together, but not as an object of the same signification and discursive laws. Foucault explains that although “general grammar and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 237.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

economics made use of notions such as need and desire, or memory and imagination; there was no epistemological consciousness of man as such.”⁴⁸ Foucault returns to Descartes’ famous essay in which “I think” becomes “I am” in order to illustrate how subjectivity and representation were intertwined in Classical thought. Since Classical language contained the nexus of being, humans could not question their own subjectivity. Investigating this subjectivity would become possible only in a new discourse that would not link representation and being and be able to bypass presentation. Once reflection on language becomes philology and the inner nature of things is studied within established fields of research—“man appears in his ambitious position as an object of knowledge and as a subject who knows.”⁴⁹ The new discursive logic of the Modern age had therefore made it possible to speak for the first time on the inner nature of things and on one’s internal truth. This logic led Foucault to state “that before the end of the eighteenth century man did not exist.”⁵⁰

However, as man himself became an object of nature his finitude must be acknowledged. Once the laws of nature and its objects were revealed as existing in time and prior to him—man’s end was displaced within the realm of thought in a more complex and ambiguous way than it had ever been before. This finitude, however, was not expressed as a determination imposed from the outside but as a function of man’s own existence (e.g., body, time, etc.). Regarding man’s finitude Foucault notes,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 308-9.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 312.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 308.

at the very heart of empiricity, there is indicated the obligation to work backwards—or downwards—to an analytic of finitude, in which man's being will be able to provide a foundation in their own positivity for all those forms that indicate to him that he is the infinite.⁵¹

As long as empirical constructs such as life, labor, and language were conceived within the episteme of representation, metaphysics of the infinite was a necessary counterpart: “The idea of infinity and the idea of determination in finitude made one another possible.”⁵² However, once representation of contents was detached and was contained within the existence of things, the idea of the infinite became useless and finitude began to refer back to itself repetitively. It is here that we see the double event of the end of metaphysics and the reappearance of man. Modern man, explains Foucault, in his “corporeal, laboring, and speaking existence—is possible only as a figuration of finitude.”⁵³

When language was seen as representative, it was thought to have an origin which could be traced back due to the relation between the representation of a thing and the representation of action (sound, gesture.) In modern thought, however, language does not assume that transparent and representational value, and such an origin is longer conceivable. Since the nineteenth-century man can only think of oneself against all the things that have already begun (e.g., life, language, labor.) Origin for man is no longer a beginning but the means by which he articulates himself against all these things that frame his existence. Man becomes a being without an origin; a task of questioning the

⁵¹ Ibid., 314.

⁵² Ibid., 317.

⁵³ Ibid., 318.

origin of things in order to give them foundation is set. Nietzsche would refer to that as the “Death of God”—the end of metaphysics in a non-representational episteme; things no longer assume an original and transcendental origin. Instead man arises and becomes, in Bradford Vivian’s words, “the origin and telos of knowledge...the identity of knowledge itself,”⁵⁴ As man is enclosed and subject to the rules of discourse and knowledge, he is born as what Roland Barthes would call: “the author”—the one who assigns meanings.

The Order of Things thus presents a historical account of language as moving away from the representative model towards a crisis of representation. Importantly, Foucault himself participates in the transformation in the status of language. By noting the relations between forms of discourse and ways of organizing knowledge and being-in-the-world, Foucault is able to question some taken-for-granted concepts such as knowledge, truth, and being and describe man as a product of language rather than as a user of a transparent system of signs. Foucault’s account, in and of itself, showcases language and discourse as inherently constitutive and ideological.

Foucault’s project(s) participate in the discussion on language and knowledge that was simultaneously developed by philosophers, linguists, psychoanalysts, and artist in the previous century. Most notable of those were Wittgenstein, Austin, Nietzsche and those leading the structuralist – post-structuralist debate: Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan. According to the post-structural approach, man is always already born into language. Rather than using language to objectively describe ‘a world,’

⁵⁴ Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*, 47.

language shapes the ways in which people understand and experience the world. On this view, the scientific claims for a realistic representation of the world are viewed as another ideological trap reminiscent of previous periods and a desire for an impossible metaphysical foundation. Alternatively, poststructuralism makes language into an object of inquiry and attempts to divulge the ways in which certain manners of speaking and writing construct particular forms of thinking and being. Foucault compares the impetus of the post-structural movement to an earthquake, a crumbling down of the ground beneath one's feet, especially in places where it perceived to be most solid and familiar.⁵⁵ Rather than trying to capture reality, art and language now create their own system of signifiers without pointing to any signifieds "out there." Ultimately, post-structuralist thought highlights the provisional and constructed nature of linguistic concepts, human beliefs, values, and even identities. It encompasses awareness, self-reflexivity and acknowledgment of cross-cultural and cross-temporal influences that are always at work shaping the ever-changing terms and identities.

Origins and Contexts

Important factors contributing to the changes in understanding of language as representation in the post-modern are the abandoning of origins and the growing focus on the contextual dimension of language. I have already mentioned Sallis' concept of the "Socratic turn" and the growing dissatisfaction with origins. In this section I elaborate more on this topic and its relation to subjectivity through a cursory survey of influential

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault et al., *Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*, 1st ed. (New York: Picador, 2003).

philosophies in the field. But before returning to Western philosophies it is important to acknowledge other philosophies that have dealt with the same problem over the ages. I, therefore, begin this section by discussing Eastern philosophies and their understanding of language as limited in its representative function due to its contextual nature. Negative dialectics was also practiced in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but was much more popular in the East. However, in spite of the prevalent use of this rhetorical form in Eastern philosophies, it was practiced there with caution in order to eschew metaphysics of presence and the fixing of origins and identities.

Eastern Philosophies

One of the most notable philosophies of language can be found in the philosophical and religious school of Indian thought: the *Advaita Vedanta*. The term “*Vedanta*” means “end of Vedas” and refers, within the Indian philosophical system and the teachings, to the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma-sutras*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and to the various philosophical systematization of them. Advaita Vedanta is a non-dual system of Vedanta that was elaborated mainly by Sankara (BC 788-820). It has been and still is the predominant philosophical thought as well as a spiritual guide acceptable in India. The goal of Advaita Vedanta is the non-dual realization of *Brahman* in which distinctions between subject and object, self and others dissolves, and the unity of all creation is experienced.

According to Advaita Vedanta, human language is useful for phenomenal experience but is limited when describing states of being, such as Brahman, that are beyond that order. Sankara maintains that language cannot describe the uniquely real. As

he notes, true cognition consists in “knowing the ‘that’ by ‘thatness’ alone and not by the ‘what.’”⁵⁶ According to Sankara’s theory of language, descriptive language is circular and can never describe the thing itself since it always must do so by applying other concepts that in turn are also partial. Thus all descriptive propositions are always incomplete except for identification propositions, which come close to completion. Pure identity, however, can be reached only *without* language. For this reason, the realization of Brahman cannot be described by the incomplete language and can only be realized in a state of speechless consciousness. This is described as *Savkha avakka eva* or “stand and stare, mute and speechless.”⁵⁷ In later Advaita’s writings, the argument for the ineffability of Brahman was made on logical grounds. In Indian semantics the ground for denoting a word is the property of the object described. The object cow is denoted by the word ‘cow’ because it has the quality of cowness. Accordingly, Madhusudan Sarasvati argued that since Brahman has no qualities no word can denote it, it is inexpressible.⁵⁸

For the school of Advaita Vedanta the real is unthinkable and can be brought to the consciousness by an act of negation and negation of the negation. Thus, although Brahman is designated in positive terms as: *satchitananda*-- “being” (*sat*), “pure” (*cit*), “bliss” (*ananda*), it is only a symbol whose attributes can only be experienced—not.⁵⁹ Importantly, the effort to ground Brahman in some metaphysics of presence is being avoided here because Advaita Vedanta emphasizes that Brahman is not *satchitananda*. if

⁵⁶ Amulya Ranjan Mohapatra, *The Idea of the Inexpressible* (New Delhi, India: Cosmo Publications, 1984), 16.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17, G Mishra, *Analytical Studies in Indian Philosophical Problems* (Bhubabeshwar: Utkal University, 1971).

⁵⁹ Eliot deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969).

by that Brahman becomes a transcendental and positive character. Yanjavalka, the Upanishadic sage, described it as “*neti-neti*” – neither this nor that.⁶⁰

The Madhyamika School in Buddhism was also cautious of language’s contextual nature. For them language does not represent but inherently introduces perceptions and attitudes due to its arbitrary nature. According to Madhyamika the world of phenomena is neither real nor unreal, but logically indeterminable and unjustifiable. Thus each phenomenon cannot be said to exist or not to exist and hence it is inexpressible. Since “words are arbitrarily chosen to represent things they are not the things in themselves but are in turn manifestations of the mind” they cannot express ultimate reality.⁶¹

The Madhyamika did not view language as pointing to an original identity but believed that language constructs the illusory belief in the very existence of independent identities. In the *Madhyamika Sastra*, Nagarjuna, the great Indian philosopher, examines a number of metaphysical concepts such as ‘time,’ ‘space,’ ‘movement,’ ‘agent,’ and ‘cause’ showing that each one of them reaches some level of absurdity or inconsistency when thoroughly examined. The truth of *sunya*, or emptiness, is central to that school, but *sunya* here does not mean that things are empty in an absolute sense or that they have *no* nature. *Sunya* serves as a heuristic and similarly to the number zero it only has value only in relation to other things. David Loy notes that here “the obvious parallel with Derrida’s *différance* runs deep. *Sunyata*, like *différance*, is permanently “under erasure,” deployed

⁶⁰ *Bṛhad-Araṇyaka Upaniṣad*
II, 3, 6.

⁶¹ Tony W Organ, "The Silence of the Buddha," *Philosophy East and West* 4 (1954): 137.

for tactical reasons but denied any semantic or conceptual stability.”⁶² The purpose of *sunyata* is thus mainly to help us “let go” of our conceptual thinking, including the concept of ‘*sunyata*.’

Nagarjuna’s emptiness doctrine implies two levels of truths: the conventional truth (*samvrtisatya*) and the ultimate truth (*paramartha-satya*). The conventional truth is derived from unsupported propositions such that their inconsistencies can be exposed through logical investigation. Since the ultimate truth of emptiness can be grasped intuitively but cannot be grasped by language, language should be used to expose the futility of language as an expression of ultimate truths.⁶³ A notable example of the use of language not only to describe but also to prescribe consciousness is the *abhidharma* discourse in which language is artificially constrained in order to illustrate the nature of the interdependent reality including the illusion of subjectivity. For example, the expression ‘I hear beautiful music’ would be in the language of the *abhidharma* something of the following:

There arises in an aural perception (*samjna*) an impulse of an auditory consciousness (*vijnana*) which is produced in dependence upon contact (*sparsa*) between the auditory faculty (*indriya*) and certain palpable vibrations emanating from a material (*rupa*) instrument; this impulse of consciousness, in concert with certain morally conditioned mental predispositions (*samskara*), occasions a feeling or hedonic tone (*vedana*) of pleasure which in turn can produce attachment (*upadana*), and so on.⁶⁴

⁶² David Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold G.; Foshay Coward, Toby (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 235.

⁶³ Mohantra, *The Idea of the Inexpressible*.

⁶⁴ Robert. Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Contexts," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 74-5.

There is no pronoun “I” and the objective description of the beautiful music is replaced with a very flat and technical description of the process of cognition that gives rise to judgment. The no-self doctrine is here reflected in the linguistic choices made by the authors of the Buddhist scriptures. The rhetoric of the abhidharma in that sense not only describes reality but also constructs an ‘empty’ experience of reality.

Both the non-dual schools of Advaita-Vedanta and Madhyamika are interested in spiritual awareness—an understanding of the union between the Brahman and Atman consciousness in the case of Advaita-Vedanta or the realization of *anatman* or the illusion of the very possibility of ‘self’ in the case of Buddhism. For both schools language cannot point to some originary presence since it is contextual and not representational. After this brief sample of selected Eastern philosophies and their understanding of language, I now move to Western philosophy and its growing understanding of language as contextual and constitutive.

Western Philosophies

Richard Rorty’s 1967 book *The Linguistic Turn* presents language and the problem of representation as the most fundamental philosophic concern.⁶⁵ In his next book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*⁶⁶ Rorty claims that philosophy had been traditionally concerned with finding illusory solution to illusory problems.⁶⁷ This was due to an engrained misconception of language and the concern with origins. Rorty traces this

⁶⁵ Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn : Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

⁶⁶ ———, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁶⁷ Frans Ruiters, "Richard Rorty," in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, ed. Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli (Malden, Massachusetts Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 281.

problematic worldview back to Descartes, who introduced the influential metaphor of the mind as a mirror of reality. The metaphor raises epistemological questions of whether the mind (language) can truthfully represent reality and whether it distorts the real. Rorty believes that these questions are futile since no originary presence or “divine perspective” that will enable us to examine the accuracy of representation can be found. His suggestion is therefore to abandon the metaphor of the “mirror” and view language as inherently contextual. Sentences should not be viewed as representations of thoughts or the world but as connected to other sentences. Rorty’s anti-representational claim has important metaphysical implications as it appears to abandon truth as humanity’s ultimate orientation. Nevertheless, Rorty holds that “the notion of accurate representation is simply an automatic and empty compliment which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us do what we want to do.”⁶⁸

The problem of representation and its implications for ethics and subjectivity was also raised by one of the most controversial philosophers of modern time: Friedrich Nietzsche. In his many writings that were chronologically written before Rorty’s, Nietzsche questions values and criticizes the “limitations of philosophy, the dangers of religion, the built-in biases of science, and the damaging consequences of institutionalized moral and cultural values.”⁶⁹ To understand the psychological need and the importance society assigns to ideals, Nietzsche investigates their emergence and the ways in which they assume their importance. This leads Nietzsche to question the

⁶⁸ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 10.

⁶⁹ Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Judith Norman, and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "Introduction," in *Beyond Good and Evil : Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxiv.

epistemic endeavor that is always influenced by human drives and passions. By debunking language's ability to represent ideals as independent and significant entities, Nietzsche is able to introduce a new dimension of criticism with regard to epistemology and society's most cherished ideas.

In his article *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*⁷⁰ Nietzsche compares man to a “fly zooming in midair, thinking itself to be the ‘flying center of the universe.’”⁷¹ Criticizing man's self-importance and the arbitrariness of ‘knowledge,’ Nietzsche then asks: “what about those conventions of language, are they really the products of knowledge, of the sense of truth?” Specifically addressing the problem of representation he further wonders: “Do the designation of things coincide? Is language the adequate expression of reality?”⁷² Nietzsche's answer to these question is a resounding ‘no.’ Building up on the idea that language works through the creation of metaphors, an idea that would be developed later by Paul Ricoeur,⁷³ Nietzsche claims that words are nothing but an arbitrary designation of signs: “A first Stimulus, first transposed into an image—first metaphor. The image, in turn, imitated by a sound—second metaphor.”⁷⁴ Delving into the inner cause of things, he argues that intellect functions through the creation of simulation; there is in fact no causal connection between words and what they supposedly

⁷⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷³ See Paul Ricoeur, "Chapter 10: Metaphor and the Main Problem," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences : Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York, Paris: Cambridge University Press; Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1981).

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense," 46.

represent. There is no such thing as “the thing in itself,”⁷⁵ or in other words, there is no originary and transcendental presence. According to Nietzsche, all we ever have access to is an endless process of relations of things to man.

Concepts are developed through our equating what is not equal. Each concept requires arbitrary abstraction and generalization as each word presumes to describe a whole class of objects (i.e. the same word ‘table’ is assigned to the endless types of individual tables.) Since we know nothing of the essence of a thing and only a few individual cases, words generalize and reduce the differences to a generalized sameness. Consequently, words keep referring back to other words but never to the ‘real thing.’ This leads Nietzsche to claim that truth is nothing but “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory for people.”⁷⁶ Language is thus inherently constitutive and meaning is inherently ideological. Worse yet, since language is accepted on face-value—as signifying and representing the world – we forget that truths are nothing but illusions.

Nietzsche is often criticized for his nihilist approach and for aestheticising ethics. It is imperative to emphasize at this point that Nietzsche does not claim that truths are impossible, but that truth is always contextual, and that we can never take into account the myriad conditions enabling it. There is no separation between the signifier and the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 46-7.

signified or between substance and appearance as everything keeps referring back to other signifiers. Since language generalizes through metaphors, an original presence and accurate representation are impossible. Every designation of words is partial, contextual and contingent on perspective. Ultimately, Nietzsche acknowledges the unbridgeable gap between subject and object and endorses the idea that the subject constructs the experience of the object from her own point of view.

Wittgenstein

An important contribution to the view of language as contextual rather than as linear and representative comes from Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his book *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein explores the relation between language and the world beginning with the way in which infants acquire language.⁷⁷ He rejects a former model by Augustine, according to which a child learns to associate words to things gradually, building meaning out of the separate blocks of words. Augustine's model presupposes, claims Wittgenstein, the child's knowledge of some kind of language which he translates into this new one. Conversely, he deduces that the child must first learn the grammar of the language before he learns the separate words. Language in fact, becomes a way of knowing the world and is a way of life. It shapes our world-view and like a prison it is hard or even impossible to think outside of it: "The ideal, as we think of it, is unshakable...it is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we

⁷⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: macmillian, 1958).

look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.”⁷⁸ Consequently, Wittgenstein is interested in understanding the grammar of language and the ways in which meaning comes to be. He thus emphasizes the existence of implicit rules within language, which determine what is “permissible” in making meaningful statements. Representation as mirroring is thus impossible since meaning is not fixed but arises from contextual systems or “*language games*.”

Wittgenstein’s rejection of the possibility of representation cannot be separated from his focus on ineffability. Already in his early writings Wittgenstein noted the problem of ineffability and affect—the connection between sensation to words in cases such as “pain.”⁷⁹ In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein discusses the limits of logical thought and language and claims that some things are inexpressible because they are inconceivable.⁸⁰ Although we can think and say things regarding the mystical these do not make coherent sense. For example, to say that “God is Good” is as problematic as to say that “Eternity is simple” because both God and eternity are unlimited and indefinable. Both lie beyond the bounds of thought and therefore cannot be talked about. Hence, Wittgenstein’s famous advice to philosophers is simply to avoid metaphysical statements.

Wittgenstein’s writings also bring us closer to understanding language as constitutive and therefore inseparable from style and performance. His emphasis on the futility of language that comes short of describing an ideal manifests in his references to

⁷⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁷⁹ My discussion on Wittgenstein’s theory and views in that regard are highly shaped by Singer’s work on the topic in which he draws connections between Wittgenstein’s view of aesthetics and ethics and their relation to his view on the connection between language, reality and the limits of expression.

⁸⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York, : Humanities Press, 1961).

the mystique, or what he calls ‘wonder of the world.’ Wittgenstein claims that “we cannot say the wonder, the miracle—but we can *show* it.”⁸¹ Any attempt to describe the world is in vain; the only thing that comes close to it is an aesthetic stance and metaphoric thinking. Language itself is a miracle as it is in fact a way of knowing the world. Consequently, Wittgenstein uses art as his ideal for expression, for art simply says: “Look!” It does not try to explain what is miraculous, nor does it negate everything, but simply shows it. Towards the end of the *Tractatus* he writes: “There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest.* They are what is mystical.”⁸² Wittgenstein conceived of his philosophy as a kind of poetry: “I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition.*”⁸³ In accordance with his belief that language cannot reflect reality but rather show it, he wrote two years before his death, “Le style c’est l’homme meme”⁸⁴ which can be translated as “Style is the actual (real) man” or “His style is the man himself.”

Wittgenstein even makes the next move of equating aesthetics with ethics. In his conversation among the Vienna circle about Heidegger’s *Being and Time* he comments:

This running-up against the limits of language is *Ethics*... Yet the tendency represented by the running-up points to *something*. St Augustine already knew this when he said: What do you wrench, so you want to avoid talking nonsense! Talk some nonsense, it makes no difference!”⁸⁵

⁸¹ ———, “Lectures on Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 11.

⁸² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.522.

⁸³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Values*, trans. ed. and G.H. Von Wright Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 24.

⁸⁴ Thomas C. Singer, “Riddles, Silences, and Wonder: Joyce and Wittgenstein Ewncoutering the Limits of Language,” *ELH* 57, no. 2 (1990): 461.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 465.

In “Lecture on Ethics”, Wittgenstein again collapses the ethical and the aesthetic: “I am going to use the term ‘ethics,’” he announces, “in a sense which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called aesthetics. “ This opens up a discussion on the limits of language:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions [e.g., those about “the miracle of the existence of the world”] were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk about Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.⁸⁶

The essence is not the pointless effort to break free from the cage of language especially in areas that seem to be ineffable—such as religion and ethics—but the understanding of the limitation of language and the making of it into an integral part of the discourse. I now move to another important philosopher who talked extensively on the boundaries of language (to which he referred as ‘the otherness of language’). Jacques Derrida has contributed immensely to current thought by illuminating the ways in which Western thought is driven by an impossible quest for origins and metaphysics of presence.

Jacques Derrida

Jacques Derrida is considered to be one of the most influential continental philosophers of the past century. Together with Lacan, Foucault, Barthes and Levi-Strauss he posited the structuralist post-structuralist debate in the academic world and the abandoning of the representative model of language. In America, his initial influence

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 466.

began with the appropriation of his work by literary theorists, particularly in the “Yale school” (e.g., Paul De Man). This arose largely due to Derrida’s interest in writing, textuality, and what to him is the inescapably literary and “metaphorical” character of all human expression, including and especially the texts of philosophy.⁸⁷ The titles of his most notable books reflect this interest in language: *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Writing and Differance*.

Influenced by writers such as Nietzsche, Freud, and phenomenological writings, especially those of Heidegger, and Levi Strauss as well as by the prevalent structuralism of the day, Derrida deconstructs the distinctions that existed between these traditions: while phenomenology speaks of authors, structuralism speaks of texts; where phenomenology values speech, structuralism values writing. Derrida rethought the way our knowledge comes to be and challenged the underlying assumptions of both these traditions as well as the foundational assumptions of Western philosophy. For Derrida (as for Wittgenstein and other post-structural writers) we are always already born into language. Language is inescapable and shapes our initial perception and world view: “Language has started without us, in us and before us.”⁸⁸ In his analyses of philosophical texts Derrida repeatedly finds, in spite of the authors’ conscious efforts, the rhetorical and metaphorical forces of language. These plays are both disruptive and significant. Derrida’s repeated and primary interest is to illustrate and ultimately subvert the pervasive Western proclivity for ignoring and suppressing such inescapable textuality and

⁸⁷ Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction : Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials.," in *Derrida and Negative Theology* ed. H. Coward & T. Foshay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 9.

lack of self-standing presence in our metaphysical assertions of presence and substance including our notions of selfhood. His primary intent throughout is to underscore what he calls the “the fallacy of logocentrism.” By this Derrida refers to the underlying assumption of western metaphysics of an entity—“a transcendental signified” – that exists somewhere outside the text and is pointed to by our words and signs.

For Derrida, as for Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, language has no self-standing, meaning-filled signifieds. All elements of meaning are constituted by their relationship to other signs. Derrida speaks in this way of each sign carrying the “trace” of the other signs within it; the French for “trace” also means track to footprint, hence the evidence in one thing of something “other” and “not present.”⁸⁹ ‘Writing’ for Derrida is broader than the empirical concept of writing and comes to refer to the fundamentally contextual and cross-referential nature of all language and all meaning. Derrida sometimes uses the term, *archi-e’criture*, “arche-writing” for this. Taking as his starting point the Saussurean synchronistic study of the signs and the relations between them, Derrida pushes this further. For him, all meaning and language are inextricably tied to differential relations. Christopher Norris summarizes a number of these points:

It is a major percept of modern structural linguistics that meaning is not a relation of identity between signifier and signified but a product of the differences, the signifying contrasts and relationships that exist at every level of language. Such was Saussure’s cardinal insight: . . .conceiving language “synchronically,” as a network of interrelated sounds and meanings. . . .Derrida draws out its radical implications for the science of writing. For if language is *always and everywhere* a system of differential signs—if meaning subsists in various structures of relationship and *not* in some ideal correspondence between sound and sense—

⁸⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology*, ed. Jacques Derrida (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xv-xvi; cf. also p. xxxix.

then the classical definition of writing would apply to every form of language whatsoever. *Writing* is in at the origin of language, since that origin cannot be conceived except by acknowledging the differential relations of signs.⁹⁰

Derrida pushes this perspective towards a critical re-examination of all our (ultimately metaphysical) notions of presence. In his words—

The play of differences involves syntheses and referrals that prevent there from being at any moment or in any way a single element that is present in and of itself and refers only to itself. . . . Each “element” . . . is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. . . . Nothing, either in the elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.”⁹¹

Thus the logos can never contain everything and something different, other and opaque always escapes and refuses to be totalized into a homogenous identity. Rather than pointing to a meaningful presence, Derrida demonstrates from his early writing the ways in which the anti-concept of *differance* operates in human consciousness, temporality, history and above all in writing. In the neologism of *differance*, Derrida is melding the seemingly distinct worlds of difference and deference. *Differance* can never refer to either difference or deference. The “a” of *differance* stands for this loss of meaning since “*differance* refers simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meanings. Spivak explains that since the difference between the French pronunciation of *differance* and *differance* is inaudible, the “a” reminds us that even the perfectly spelled graphic word is always absent, “constituted through endless series of spelling mistakes.”⁹² The difficulties raised by the context reflect those embedded in the linguistic situation for the word itself

⁹⁰ Norris, *Derrida*, 85-86.

⁹¹ Derrida in Culler, *On Deconstruction : Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, 99.

⁹² Spivak, "Translator's Preface."

can be understood only in a context and be understood by its difference from other words. What difference reminds us of is that “terms have meaning only in reference to their opposites and that they contain no meaning of their own.”⁹³ Each term can be understood only through contextual detour and deferral of meaning. This constitutes for Derrida a paradigmatic aporia, a shuttling between different meanings and worlds that carries his understanding of *arce-écriture*. The “a” in the French language stands for continuity and thus difference continuously becomes, before it has become a difference. The end “ance” “remains undecided between active and passive, announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation.”⁹⁴ By pointing to the shifting margins of language, Derrida raises our awareness of the artificial and divisive nature of concepts and identity. In this way, difference merges temporality and difference and raises the problem of writing and the sign.

The sign is usually placed to represent a thing or meaning when in fact it already represents it in its absence “when the present cannot be present, we signify.”⁹⁵ But more than that it refers to the ontological problem of Being as some timeless self identity that exists somewhere outside the text. Derrida refers to that as the logocentrism fallacy. Although logocentrism exists in all cultures, Derrida maintains that only European culture has developed it to metaphysics. Western metaphysics is founded on the notion of presence, of a kind of ‘transcendental signified’ standing apart from and behind, but directly connected to and pointed toward by, our words and signs. This logocentrism

⁹³ Nancy J. Holland, *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, Re-Reading the Canon. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "From Difference," in *Critical and Cultural Theory Reader* (1968), 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

gives privilege to speech or to voice over writing because speech, more than writing, lends itself to the pretense of presence. Writing, according to Derrida is considered “subversive” in so far as it creates a spatial and temporal distance between the author and audience. Writing presupposes the absence of the author so we can never be sure exactly what is meant by a written text; it can have many different meanings as opposed to a single unifying one.⁹⁶ We can recognize this in writing in the narrow sense but writing as a structure refers to that same logocentricism and the play of presence and absence in the face of the inevitable ineffability, “the thing itself always escapes.”⁹⁷

In the gesture of deconstruction the goal is to expose rather than to neutralize that otherness of language and to show how in each instance differance precedes presence rather than the contrary.⁹⁸ Derridean deconstruction is therefore not a propositional philosophy nor can it be defined as a practice or a method. Deconstruction is rather a performative practice and is referred to by Derrida himself as a ‘gesture.’ Deconstruction does not attempt to expose since this would assume the existence of something, but rather to demonstrate and denaturalize the logocentric presuppositions operating in Western discourse. In being true to his metaphysical project Derrida’s philosophy has nothing to say and his method of deconstruction functions more as a gesture or a practice which demonstrates the paradoxical, aporetic and ultimately “undecidable” self-contradictory

⁹⁶ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 116.

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston,: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 104.

⁹⁸ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

forces ineluctably at play in any purportedly univocal, self-identical text. Derrida's writings therefore frequently consist of analyses of other philosophical texts in which he attends to the inescapability and disruptively metaphorical and rhetorical elements inherent to language use.

Derrida in his method of deconstruction has undone centuries of Western metaphysics in a similar fashion to the mystics' deconstruction of consciousness. In his language as well, Derrida uses negation: "[*différance*] is a non-concept in that it cannot be defined in terms of oppositional predicates; it is neither *this* nor *that*; but rather *this and that* (e.g. the act of differing and of deferring) without being reducible to a dialectical logic either."⁹⁹ And elsewhere, "at each step I was obliged to proceed by ellipses, corrections and corrections of corrections, dropping each concept at the very moment that I needed to use it."¹⁰⁰ Derrida himself was asked about the relation between deconstruction and negative theology. In his answer he rejected the comparison but expressed fascination with it:

This is not at all the same discourse as negative theology. *Différance* is not a being and it is not God (if that is, this name [God] is given to a being, even a supreme being). Also, despite the resemblances... nothing in such a discourse [of difference] strikes me as more alien to negative theology. And yet, as often happens, this infinite distance is also an infinitesimal distance. That is why negative theology fascinates me.¹⁰¹

Derrida rejects the Monotheist use of negative theology since even their negation and silence is grounded in metaphysics of presence—negation is used to ultimately assert the

⁹⁹ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 110.

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Différance. ," in *Margins of Philosophy* ed. Jacques Derrida (Chicago: The university of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

existence of some transcendental Being. We shall see that Derrida's observation is relevant for Christian metaphysics and understanding of language. However, it is not relevant for all religions. Hebrew and Jewish rhetoric emphasize differences, contingency and do not take words as pointers to external origins. In fact, Handelman claims that Derrida's deconstruction is strikingly similar to rabbinic exegesis.¹⁰² Buddhism does not even believe in a God or a self but in exposing the sunya (empty) and illusory nature of consciousness that creates a false sense of Self. In that manner, sunya somewhat resembles the notion of the trace that recognizes the interdependency of all concepts.

David Loy draws some interesting connection between the Buddhist sunyata and *differance*. For him, the need for security and grounding of the self, even if it is sublimated into a transcendent God is the cause of logocentrism and ontotheology's enduring attraction. Since the self's greatest fear is the fear of not being real the self wants to realize itself, but what sunyata/trace show is that this can never be attained. The Buddhist and to some extent also the deconstructive solution have to do according to Loy with acceptance of that impossibility. Any attempt to catch the future keeps pointing back to itself and perpetuate the same logocentric inclination. The goal is not to create that self-presence; rather, the constitutive element of this performative gesture is to bring about a change in perspective;¹⁰³ or to collapse the belief in a fixed perspective—a self—at all.

¹⁰² Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

¹⁰³ Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism."

In sum, the past century in the West had seen a change in regard the status of language and the belief in its ability to reflect reality. The relation between the signifier and the signified is no longer direct but is considered to be the result of endless discourses and contexts. Meaning is not fixed but is contingent to the specific utilities and language games. What this ultimately means is that the problem of ineffability is inherent to the use of language and the desire for self presence. Meaning and subjectivity are not considered any more as independent identities; they have no origin and are in fact linguistic constructs. Viewing language as inherently contextual and contingent on uses rather than as referential has important implications. In the next section I elaborate more on the ways in which the abandoning of origins and identities make language constitutive and language use inherently rhetorical.

Terministic Screens

The rhetorician Kenneth Burke points to the inherent limitations of language and the impossibility of direct and clear representation but emphasizes the rhetorical element of symbolic action. Burke rejects the prospect of finding origins of and in language. Origins are not essential, according to Burke, who prefers to view language as a given. As far as language's capacity to represent things, Burke endorses that "even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality."¹⁰⁴

Burke refers to Jeremy Bentham who pointed out that the words used to discuss mental

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action; Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1966), 45.

states, relationships, ethics, etc are borrowed from the physical realm. The term ‘superciliousness’ for example, means a literal raising of the eyebrows, and the word ‘spirit’ means breath. Similarly, the words ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ carry over to the moral realm the same baggage they have in the physical field. They are therefore insufficient and reduce the complexity of a reality they supposedly reflect. This observation, Burke emphasizes, is true not only to one field of knowledge but to any symbolic action.

By dismissing the importance of origins, and by pointing to the selective function of language—the focus of language shifts from its reflective to its constitutive nature. Burke is not interested in a scientific understanding of language but in its rhetorical one, or what he calls: the “dramatistic approach.” According to Burke’s dramatistic view, language (or any symbolic action) inevitably directs our attention in one way or another; Burke refers to this as ‘*terministic screens*.’ Just as the same object can differ from one photograph to another pending on the lens used, the same dream would be interpreted in various ways pending on the training of the psychoanalyst. Due to its inherently selective nature language has the same filtering capacity. The implication is that some observations made about the world, and some motives for action, are in fact a spin of a particular use of terms.

We must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 50.

In *Symbols and Society* Burke says “motives are short-hand terms for situations,”¹⁰⁶ insinuating that the terms used in each context imply motivation for a different course of action. This approach introduces rhetoric and persuasion as integral an inevitable consequence of the fact that symbolic action operates as terministic screens; the implication according to Burke is that even the most unemotional ‘scientific nomenclatures’ are necessarily suasive¹⁰⁷ and the focus of researchers should be analyzing language as a mode of action rather than as a mode of conveying information.¹⁰⁸

Susanna K. Langer, a noted scholar in the field of symbols and representations, also discusses the constitutive and inherently rhetorical element of the symbolic use of language. Langer distinguishes between *signs* and *symbols*.¹⁰⁹ A sign refers to something in space and time and is related to real experience; a symbol invokes something and implies an attitude towards it. To illustrate the connection between sign and thinking in symbolic process Langer uses the example of food. While the possibility of meal might remind a dog of the possibility of eating in the present moment; humans might be reminded of other experiences of meals they have had or would have. Langer’s distinction thus introduces the process of representation as both an objective and as a subjective process in which cultural and personal dispositions always play a part in the

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Burke and Joseph R. Gusfield, *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 126.

¹⁰⁷ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action; Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ Susanne Katherina Knauth Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key; a Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, [3d ed. (Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1957), 31.

symbolization process. According to Langer, “symbols thus inevitably entail perceptions and attitudes, invoke culture and history.”¹¹⁰

Relevant for this dissertation is research in the field of religious studies that showed how even the most intimate and subjective experience—that of mystical experience--- is rhetorically constructed. According to Steven Katz, mystical experiences should not be read as individual and singular events but as participating in the larger discourse of any particular religion. It is well known that mystics of different traditions have different mystical experiences¹¹¹ and this, according to Katz, is in large part due to the different rhetoric of these traditions. Not only does the experience give rise to words, but acting as terministic screens, canonical texts direct the community’s focus and shape the consciousness of the followers in different ways. For this reason, a Christian is not ready to encounter the illusory nature of reality and the impersonal *neti-neti* Brahman consciousness or Buddhist sunyata. Rather, she encounters the personal God or Jesus and the Trinity.¹¹² Rhetoric is so crucial that it might shape the particular awakening of those exposed to it. Commenting on a critique in regard the importance of using both negative and expressive discourse, Gimello emphasizes:

The success in mystical attainment hangs by a thread of rhetoric. An inappropriate verbal strategy, e.g., the adoption of the mock profundity of unqualified apophasis, can skew an aspirant’s practice and deflect him from his true goal. Clearly, the misuse of language could not have such dire consequences unless its proper use had inversely proportionate beneficial results. There must then, as we

¹¹⁰ Brummett, *The World and How We Describe It*.

¹¹¹ Steven T. Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹¹² ———, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

have suggested, be some deep and necessary connection between discourse and experience.¹¹³

In his various writings Steven Katz demonstrates the ways in which the use of negative dialectics, imagery and mantras not only describe a particular religious world view but actually construct a particular mystical experience.

Cognitive Psychology

A very interesting turn in the understanding of language, representation and subjectivity comes from current studies in cognitive psychology. These studies show cognition to be embodied, enactively emerging and inter-subjective. They claim that the mind is always intertextual, co arising and is in fact comprised of imagination and fantasy. This model further shakes the ground under the notions of independent subjectivity, an independent reality, and the possibility of representation as mirroring. Francisco Varela, a leading researcher in the field, summarizes the main conclusions to be drawn from current research.

According to plenty of evidence from research done in cognitive science from the early nineties, the mind does not function in the way insinuated by the computer metaphor. In contrast to the previous conception that views the mind as the software and the body as the hardware; there can be, in fact, no mental capacity without full embodiment and enfoldment with the world. Varela's terse slogan is: 'the mind is not in

¹¹³ Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Contexts," 77.

the head.¹¹⁴ In fact, it cannot be separated from the *entire* organism. In other words, in light of current research, the old philosophical statement according to which the mind and body are separated is nothing but ‘ludicrous.’

An object, Varela explains, cannot be an independent being ‘out-there.’ The object and the sense of self arise, or co-arise, because of one’s activity in the world. This co-arising is dependent on the constant sensory motor activity and embedment within phenomena. Varela gives the example of a classic experiment with two kittens that are blind from birth. Both kittens were carried around in a basket and were exposed to the same environment, but while one was allowed to walk for a few hours a day, the other kitten was kept tucked in the basket. Two months later, the two cats were released and showed marked differences in behavior. The cat whose feet were free and was allowed to move in the environment behaved like a normal cat. The other one did not recognize objects and kept stumbling and bumping into things. “The conclusion *not* to draw,” Varela emphasizes “is that cats see with their feet! The conclusion to draw is that space arises out of movement.”¹¹⁵ This dramatic statement implies that “this thing in front that seems the most objective, the pillar of objectivity in physics, is totally inseparable from the fact that we have to sensory-motor handle it.”¹¹⁶ Cognition is therefore *enactively embodied*; cognition is what arises by the act of doing something in the world. In other words, the world out there and the self in the world are not separated. The mind is not

¹¹⁴ Francisco J. Varela, "Steps to a Science of Inter-Being: Unfolding the Dharma Implicit in Cognitive Science," in *The Psychology of Awakening : Buddhism, Science, and Our Day-to-Day Lives*, ed. Gay Watson, Stephen Batchelor, and Guy Claxton (York Beach, Me.: S. Weiser, 2000), 80.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

separated from the *entire* organism, and it is impossible to determine whether it is ‘outside’ or ‘inside.’

Another key point in regard to cognition is the manner in which it arises; Varela succinctly refers to it in the following slogan: “*The mind neither exists nor does it not exist.*”¹¹⁷ When observing the way cognition works, it becomes clear that the local interactions between the millions of millions of connections between neurons and groups of neurons are very fast, dynamic and simultaneous. From all these local connections arises the amazing phenomenon of a *global* process, or a global state which is neither independent of these states nor reducible to them. The emergence from the local to the global level has different ontological status, because it brings about the creation of an individual or a cognitive unity. We behave as unified selves that think, feel, see, etc. when in fact this cognitive self is the result of myriad of single connections not reducible to anything in particular. So, explains Varela: “it’s like saying that it is and it isn’t there.”¹¹⁸ Cognition is therefore not only enactively embodied but is *enactively emergent*.

Varela emphasizes that the process of emergence is a two way process, the local components give rise to the emergent mind, but the mind constrains, affects directly these local components. Local activity affects the overall state but the overall state also affects the local connections. The common Western perception according to which the body supports the mind, but not the other way around—is according to Varela ‘demonstrably wrong.’ Cognition is enactively emerging from the local components and the global

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

cognitive subject. Important for us is the implication derived from the first point according to which cognition is embodied, and the second point regarding emergence. They suggest that the mind cannot represent some state of affairs that exists objectively and separately from the mind since the mind is not separated from them. The mind is, states Varela, “constantly secreting this coherent reality that constitutes the world, the coherence of the organism through the local-global transitions. Stated in other words, perception is as imaginary, as imagination is perception based.”¹¹⁹ A few experiments show that an actively embodied organism would use any sensory-motor interaction for constituting a world which is fully shaped and formed. This point is of great importance since it shifts the focus from believing that there are properties in the world that need to be understood and represented through symbols, to the notion that anything can give an excuse for the invention of reality. Our world, Varela emphasizes, is imagination and fantasy. The past view of language which mirrors the mind which mirrors the objective and external world is therefore at odds not only with current philosophy but with current research in cognitive science. The mind does not reflect an objective world but co-arises with it and language functions as another component through which the world emerges.

The second implication of this principal, explains Varela, is that since cognition arises from local to global, the mind cannot be separated into discrete entities of vision, affect, memory, etc. What we call ‘mind’ is what arises from the affective tonality, which is embedded in the body. The whole process lasts a fraction of a second, “over and over

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 77.

and over again.”¹²⁰ The sensory process moves from the sensory motor surfaces near the spinal cord in the brain, moves upwards to the limbic system, and onto the superior cortex. The momentary arising of a mental state therefore always stems from affect; what we call ‘reason’ is the last stage in the process. Reason and categories of thinking, emphasizes Varela, “are literally the tips of the mountain which we are sitting on, which particularly affect emotion.”¹²¹ This has significant importance for this study’s interest in ineffability. The process in which cognition arises explains why phenomenological experience is hard to articulate. It is hard to put into words because it is based on the pre-reflective, affective, non-conceptual, pre-noetic. It is *not* beyond words, but it *precedes* words. Because the experience is so grounded in affect it has not yet become the element of reason of which “we tend to think is the highest expression of mind.”¹²² This corresponds with the study on intuitive experience mentioned in the first chapter, according to which people need intervals of time in order to articulate their intuitive experiences.¹²³

Varela draws another important point in regard subjectivity. Recent study clearly shows that intersubjectivity and individuality are not in opposition, but complementary. In this light, the old philosophical project set to prove the existence of the mind is absurd. The real question asks Varela, is rather, how come people come to assume a distinct identity when the presence of the other is so close? Recent studies show that the relation

¹²⁰ Ibid., 78.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., 78.

¹²³ Petitmengin-Peugeot, "The Intuitive Experience."

to higher primates is not the use of language but the ability to interpret the other's behavior. This terrain is not highly mapped yet, but pioneering work on babies shows that the boundaries of the self and other are not delineated even in perceptual events and the constitution of the self and the other are in fact simultaneous and interconnected. Other studies demonstrate babies' ability for emphatic response only a few hours after birth and others find that love and care determine not only brain property but also the level of genetic expression. In other words, the physical, bodily constitution of these children is modified by affective expressions. "The basic point," Varela emphasizes, "is always the same: cognition is *generatively enactive*, that is a co-determination of Me-Other."¹²⁴ Affect is a necessary and pre-reflective stage in the constitution of the self. It is felt and arises, before words and the awareness of identity: "Affect is primordial in the sense that I am affected or moved before any 'I' that knows."¹²⁵

The pre-verbal quality of affect makes it inseparable from the presence of others. To understand it we must remember the relations between affect and the body, since any affect is felt not as something external but is directly felt in the lived body. The lived body plays an important role in our interaction and understanding of the other as another subject. We are linked to the other through the body first as an organism similar to us, but also as an embodied presence, site and means of an experiential field. The body becomes the source of affect, in particular empathy and any interaction is by essence a site of

¹²⁴ Varela, "Steps to a Science of Inter-Being: Unfolding the Dharma Implicit in Cognitive Science."

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

intersubjectivity. This leads Varela to the last point in his essay according to which *Consciousness is a public affair*.

The recent boom in consciousness studies provides a background for this last statement. The main intuition animating this point is that the need for proper scientific study of the mind requires a detailed examination of experience itself. Furthermore, “examined experience and scientific analysis have a non-dual relationship, a mutual determination that avoids the extremes of both neuro-reductionism and some ineffability of consciousness.”¹²⁶ The need to examine experience without reducing it to neural accounts leads Varela to the interface with spiritual traditions which unlike cognitive science, which has been almost entirely interested in cognitive faculties in ordinary life, have examined experience without taking it at face value. The problem of methodology and the relation between external scientific accounts to first person descriptions discloses a number of disturbing challenges that make this key point far less consensual than the preceding ones.

According to Varela, phenomenology has mainly dealt with textual analysis and repetition of descriptions from Husserl or others, without the disciplined engagement to make these descriptions afresh. Beyond phenomenology there are introspectionist schools in the early-twentieth century psychology and the highly detailed non-Western traditions (i.e., Buddhism, Taoism, Gnosticism.) The multiplicity of methods presents a

¹²⁶ Ibid., 82.

challenge—finding a homology between the methods to realize whether there is a basic structure shared by these various pragmatics of experience.¹²⁷

The pragmatics of exploring experience, explains Varela, requires the examination not of what is done but also ‘where’ it is done. In other words, the examination of experience must not ignore the lived body (*leib*) as was previously discussed. In both ordinary and in spiritual experiences, experience is both a ‘pure domain’ which may or may not be described by invariant categories and the intersubjective world. At the same time, it is an event that is always linked to the temporality of the world and the ways in which it is manifested in one’s living body. Needless to say, emphasizes Varela, that the study of experience requires examination of experience with all the complexity involved with the lived body and requires a case by case analysis of the neurophenomenology of time, the ever –present embodied now, or the origin of the image of self.”¹²⁸

An important lesson to be learned from the project of neurophenomenology is the revival of philosophical and methodological research. This line of study can bridge the gap between the cognitive and the phenomenological mind and cannot ignore the constitutive basis for the mutual reciprocity between the cognitive and the bodily. While the study of experiences in different spiritual traditions has taken place since the days of William James, I believe that focus on rhetoric in this regard can enrich not only the rhetorical tradition but also the line of research advocated here by Varela. By changing

¹²⁷ Ibid., 83.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 84.

our lens from the experience to the ways in which the description is rhetorically constructed, we move to the imaginative capacity of the mind and can therefore have better access to the ways in which the experience emerges. Varela emphasizes the importance of studying the origin of the image of self and the perceptions of time—both of which are relevant especially in studies on awakening.

In summary of the last section, it can be seen that current philosophers, researchers in religious studies and in cognitive science subscribe to the belief that subjectivity and subjective experience are constructed through language. Reality is not seen as objectively existing, it cannot be mirrored by the mind and then be represented in words; rather, the world and the subject co arise through embodiment and enfoldment in the world. The mind and language do not function like a mirror but function inventively; the mind is imagination and fantasy. Ineffability derives from being grounded in affect; it is preverbal rather than beyond words and awareness of the experience precedes any awareness of Self. Experiences and consciousness should be therefore viewed as intersubjective and interconnected. Following Foucault and the post-structural view of the constitutive rather than a representative understanding of language, researchers in the past few decades have focused their efforts on exposing the ideological and rhetorical elements of language use in the construction of both worldviews and experience.

Dialectics of Presence and Absence- Haunting

As we have seen, the Enlightenment model of representation which expected balance between form and substance, words and things in the world had gradually

morphed into the constitutive model. According to this latter approach, words keep referring to other words rather than to some originary presence and identity that can be located. This post-structuralist and especially the deconstructivist approach were interpreted and criticized by some writers as a complete rejection of the possibility of representation and unmediated knowledge.¹²⁹ However, this very criticism was in turn charged as simplistic and superficial. In the words of Jacques Derrida,

There have been several misinterpretations of what I and other deconstructionists are trying to do. It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the ‘other’ of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the ‘other’ and the ‘other of language.’¹³⁰

This ‘other’ is beyond language and although it is not a referent in the traditional linguistic sense that was ascribed to the term¹³¹ it does not exclude the possibility of unmediated understanding. To challenge the ‘habitual structure of language’ and the common assumptions regarding representations, Derrida emphasizes, “does not amount to saying that there is nothing beyond language.”¹³² The idiom of haunting and ghosts complicates the simplistic dichotomy between the model of representation that is grounded in metaphysics of presence, and the model of constitutive language that is often considered as an enclosure in nothingness. Since this dissertation deals with the rhetoric of the ineffable and what supposedly eludes words, I would like at this stage to return to

¹²⁹ For example, see Walsh, *The Dark Matter of Words : Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*.

¹³⁰ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 123.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 125.

Derrida and focus on the idiom of haunting which I take to be a place holder for discussing the slipperiness of ineffability and the ‘otherness’ of language.

Deconstruction emerged as a reaction to the ‘apocalyptic tone in philosophy’ prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century. In answer to theories of “the end of History,” “the end of man,” and “the end of Marxism,” Derrida deconstructed the metaphysics that constituted thinking in terms of origin, telos and progression. Central to this task is openness to ‘the otherness of language,’ to that which cannot be translated through a distinct origin but through the use of terms that keep referring back to other terms. Haunting begins in Freud as a psychological condition of mourning, but is expressed textually in the attempts to articulate what is/not there, what is in continuous cessation. Haunting therefore serves as the corporeal place holders for the trace, the continual return, the in-between, the idea of the ‘always already absent.’ In Derrida, haunting replaces ontology and the Western inclination for metaphysics of presence—the trace of the other significations is self effacement—it is always already there; yet it is not. No concept can be conceived as independently originating and independently terminating and there are no transcendental signifiers. Since nouns fix things in their identity, haunting prefers the ebb and flow of gerunds, which underscore the process of becoming, I-ing.

In his *Specters of Marx* Derrida suggests that the only way to live is between life and death: “neither in life nor in death *alone*.”¹³³ Breaking the dichotomy between the

¹³³ Sigmund Freud and Walter John Herbert Sprott, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1933), Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), xviii.

most fundamental and undeniable ontology: life with its supposed opposite—death; Derrida offers a third form: the ghostly. The ghost is not an essence, or substance, or existence, and it is never present as such; it is ‘a certain power of transformation.’¹³⁴ The identity and the presence of the ghost cannot be located; they are between the thing itself and the simulacrum. The ghost has no beginning or end since the event of apparition always begins by coming back. It does not belong to life or to death since it carries life into death and brings death into life. Unlike negation that can be viewed as a pose, haunting has no starting and ending but a continuous return.

The symbolic embodiment of that presence in absence and the threshold experience is most notable in Derrida’s discussion of ghosts and the distinction between the *spirit* and the *specter*. The ghosts arise from the process of mourning and the attempt to ontologize, “to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead.”¹³⁵ It is the need to anchor the absence with a present grave and identity that summons the apparition. “The specter,” he writes, “is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of spirit.”¹³⁶ It is the symbolic embodiment of the spirit “for it is flesh and phenomenality that give the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappears right away in the apparition.”¹³⁷ The irreversible withdrawal of the specter’s corporality is paradoxically what gives it its haunting and embodied apparition, “the specter, as its name indicates, is the *frequency* of

¹³⁴ Derrida, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 9.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

a certain visibility but the visibility of the invisible.”¹³⁸ The specter is a threshold between realities, and is perceptible only in obscurity. Its status and the discursive conditions that enable its visibility derive therefore from its exact liminal status.¹³⁹ In *The Specters of Marx*, Derrida refers to the specter as ‘revenant’, ‘a ghost’ in German. He will use the same term again at the opening to his book *Of Spirit* in which he interrogates Heidegger’s *Geist* and his ‘avoiding means.’ Here, the revenant maintains its transformative energy through the metaphor of flame and ashes, which like the ghostly, has no recognized essence that begins or ends.

“The ghostly, the question of Being, the spirit, is through and through,” maintains Derrida, “a question of *language*¹⁴⁰ [italics mine]. It refers to the possibility of presenting in absence, of gesturing towards the spiral of aporia but importantly, without falling into nihilism.¹⁴¹ Derrida explores the ways in which the spirit or the spiritual appears and at the same withdraws from the scene in Heidegger’s writings. He describes the ways in which Heidegger ‘says without saying, write without writing,’ uses words without using them—for example, in using a non-negative cross-shaped crossing out, or propositions such as: “If I were yet to write a theology, as I am sometimes tempted to do, the word being ought not to appear in it.”¹⁴² Of a similar importance is the word *dasein* whose

¹³⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹³⁹ Vivian, *Being Made Strange: Rhetoric Beyond Representation*, 173.

¹⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit : Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1.

¹⁴¹ In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida rigorously reject the title of nihilism often accompanied to his name: “I totally refuse the title of nihilism which has been ascribed to me and my American colleagues.” Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 39.

¹⁴² Derrida, *Of Spirit : Heidegger and the Question*, 2.

meaning remains ‘a sort of ontological obscurity.’¹⁴³ The word relates back to a series of meanings, all of them are opposed to ‘the thing.’ “Spirit is not the thing, spirit is not the body.”¹⁴⁴ *Dasein* itself therefore prepares the way for a new thinking of man in a way that precedes ontology.

Geist thus forms part of the series of non-things, of what in general one claims to oppose to the thing, it is what in no way allows itself to be thingnified. But so long as the Being of what one understands by thing is not ontologically clarified—not done, apparently, by Descartes or Husserl, or by anyone who might have recommended us not to thingnify the subject, soul consciousness, spirit, person—these concepts remain problematic or dogmatic.¹⁴⁵

By taking the non-conceptual concept of ghost and the specter, Derrida acknowledges the return of Freud, Heidegger and the Western history of doing and undoing of metaphysics. The ghostly enables the deconstruction of basic dualities such presence or absence, life and death, real or unreal, being and not-being—by being either, and/or both. It offers a possibility for discussing what cannot be discussed, the ‘other’ that haunts language. Importantly, it does so by maintaining the relation between language and subjectivity that was central to the work of these writers. It is this connection that makes the process of ‘awakening’ –which suggests the emergence of a new subjectivity—so relevant for discussing ineffability and haunting.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics becomes increasingly important in the current view of language and the construction of reality. Symbols are no longer seen as merely a mirror of reality but as

¹⁴³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

orienting attention and constituting perception. When the mind is understood as imagination and fantasy and since reality is understood to be arising from enfoldment in the world, affective experiences such as aesthetics become important in the construction of reality. I have mentioned in numerous places in this chapter the relations between aesthetics and the current understanding of the constitutive model. For Nietzsche, even ideals such as truth are grounded not in substantial values but in metaphoric thinking and aesthetization of reality. Wittgenstein collapses aesthetics and ethics and takes the stance that since language cannot represent, it can only function like art and ‘show’ rather than explain. Especially in particular cases which elude language such as mystery and religion, aesthetics—”running against the walls of language”—becomes the only way for conveying a certain experience. Derrida also relies on literature in order to get at the otherness, what haunts every language and every culture. Aesthetics is thus essential since it effectively participates in the affective experience—which is fundamentally ineffable. Aesthetics is also important as an exemplary form for expressing, and gesturing towards the otherness of language. In this section I would like to elaborate on what I believe to be a particular type of aesthetics which is relevant for haunting and dialectics of presence and absence, the game of shadows and the evocation of longing—elements which I take to be both rhetorical and especially relevant for discussions of ineffability.

Kenneth Burke points out that the ultimate mystery manifests in the “symbol as enigma, as classification and obfuscation, speech and silence, publicity and secrecy, for it

simultaneously expresses and conceals the thing symbolized.”¹⁴⁶ An aspect of the mystery created in the dialectics between presence and absence is expressed by Gaston Bachelard, who in his classic *La Poetic de l’espace* developed a theory on the phenomenology of poetic imagination.¹⁴⁷ At one point in the book he discusses the poetic image of doors and the possibilities afforded by it for the poet and reader:

But how many daydreams should we analyze under the simple heading of Doors! For the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of daydream that accumulates desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open.¹⁴⁸

Bachelard distinguishes between *reve* (dream) and *reverie* (daydreaming). *Reve* is equated with pure negation of reality and is equated for Bachelard with simple dreams of escapism. *Reverie*, on the other hand, designates imagination and constant recreation of reality and the emergence of being. The poetic image of doors, according to Bachelard is appealing because doors embody a *promise* of being and becoming. They can be either open or closed and as he would go on saying, they can be just barely open. It is the possibility afforded by the image of a door and the ways in which it enables the reader to daydream that lures us. The undetermined door thus exists as a possibility and it

¹⁴⁶ Kenneth Burke and Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives : And, a Rhetoric of Motives*, Meridian Books ; M148 (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962), 120.

¹⁴⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Orion Press, 1964).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

functions as the mystified sign that guarantees human creativity. This would be especially relevant to the rhetoric of awakening or persona as something that promises to be in the future but is already there.

The symbol as enigma, revealing and hiding is a convention not only in religion but also in another realm that is often considered to be ineffable- art. When art alludes to something beyond the text rather than exposing it completely, it can nourish longing and desire. For Keats, for example, mystery and uncertainty is equated with beauty, a condition he sees as all-encompassing and obliterating other emotions. The poet's path, according to him, should lie in "being... content with half knowledge," a positive faculty distinct from reason.¹⁴⁹ The aesthetic of shadows and the unfinished becomes especially important in renaissance art since some of its greatest masterpieces are either unfinished or in a very bad shape. Michelangelo finished only very few of his projects and sculptures. Six statues of prisoners meant for the tomb of Pope Julius II, four in Florence, two in Paris, are all unfinished, some barely started. Michelangelo said that to him, the figure was already inside the marble and all he did was remove the unnecessary bits of stone around it. Michelangelo's metaphor is also loosely used in reference to the possibility of spiritual awakening and the possibility of transformation that like statues within the marble, exists as potentiality before any defining event.

The allure of pieces of art is enhanced when it is not completely comprehensible and defined in limiting ways. The audience then participates in the creation of the new piece of art by adding their own imagination. Part of the power of the works by

¹⁴⁹ Martin, *Beauty and Holiness : The Dialogue between Aesthetics and Religion*.

Caravaggio is that he painted brightly lit figures emerging out of darkness. Although some critics accused him of using this method in order to compensate for poor artistic ability, he insisted that the half lit figures were a deliberate choice. Rodin's statue Venus of an armless torso is considered to have evocative power especially because it is incomplete yet perfect in its passing beyond the possibility of being and even of imagination.¹⁵⁰ For Rodin himself it is the tension of presence and absence made possible through interplay of light and shadows that makes Venus beautiful:

The shadows, the divine play of shadows on antique marbles! One might say that shadows love masterpieces. They hang upon them, they make for them adornment. I find only among the Gothic and with Rembrandt such orchestras of shadows. They surround beauty with mystery; they pour peace over us to hear without the trouble that eloquence of flesh that ripens and amplifies the spirit."¹⁵¹

Once again, the aesthetic equation proposed by Rodin—that art aspires to darkness, that it is most intense when half-perceived—is not as eccentric as it may at first appear. On a more general note, Rodin explains: “The expression of life, in order to keep the infinite suppleness of reality, must never be stopped or fixed. The dark element, essential to the effect, must then be carefully contrived.”¹⁵²

In this sense Rodin's work can be seen within the larger context of the *non finito*, the deliberately unfinished work whose lasting seductive effect depends heavily on its seeming to be incomplete or fragmentary. The manipulation of lights and shadows, lacunes and absences to create an aesthetic of incomplete exists also in other traditions. In both Chinese landscape paintings and Moroccan rugs, a corner is left incomplete.

¹⁵⁰ Walsh, *The Dark Matter of Words : Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*, 18.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Unfinished rugs, cracked tea cups, as well as unfinished novels and armless torsos, shadows and silences enable the appreciation of the ordinary. Importantly, they also evoke sweet longing for what lies beyond the threshold of representation and exist as a possibility that is paradoxically already there. This refers both to the possibility of awakening as well as to the possibility of the texts to be ever developing and negotiated between the readers and creators.

Subjectivity

I have attempted to show throughout the chapter the ways in which different models of language have shaped different understandings of subjectivity. In the episteme of representation, words and man are understood as reflecting back to some ideal presence. This lends itself to religious applications referred to by Derrida and Heidegger as onto-theological- the view of man in the image of God. The very idea of metaphysics of presence, as something that exists outside the text is related to the very understanding of divinity as presence and origin, as the ideal from which in his image all other things are created.

Operating from within the framework of representation, the self is perceived to be composed of representations, of images and discourses that unify a real experience. Since each thing is perceived as the signifier of something else and as projecting these meanings out to the world, the self is also not the 'real' thing but the signifier of some other presence-- be it the nation, ideology, or God.¹⁵³ Brummett explains that

¹⁵³ Barry Brummett, *The World and How We Describe It : Rhetorics of Reality, Representation, Simulation* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 74.

representation in that sense can be social with the signs displayed for others to project meaning. Subjectivity is therefore performed and displayed through symbols that represent another, more original identity.

This linear model becomes more complicated in the constitutive model. The very presentation and identification with the signs is seen as the very thing that constructs one's identity. Brummett explains that "since the self is comprised of representations in a social context, the subject is also validated, confirmed, and identified through them."¹⁵⁴ He illustrates this idea through Norton's discussion of the American subjectivity. The constitution which is a written form in practice becomes a form that represents each individual. Representation through the constitution therefore affirms and validates that very same American subjectivity: "we are a nation because we have a constitution that represents us."¹⁵⁵ In a model in which signs do not refer to some original presence, subjectivity also does not progress from an original towards its fruition. All the signs keep referring back to other signs and as noted, man now is considered to be the origin and telos of knowledge, the author, the one that ascribes meaning. The self in a post-structural sense is said to be simulational, as "all masks, appearance and presentation, style and image."¹⁵⁶

The discussion of haunting is especially relevant for the constitutive understanding of subjectivity. The notion of spirit or ghost, as a mode of being that is not alive, or dead, present or not present does not have an origin or end but is always

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 76.

becoming. I have discussed haunting as a question of language, as a place holder for the trace, the continual return, the otherness of language. I have suggested haunting as a way to relate to the problem of ineffability and what cannot be expressed in words and at the same time assumes form by the very use of language. At this stage, I would like to relate the relevance of ‘awakening’ to the current discussion on ineffability and haunting. It was suggested in the first chapter that moments of transformation or awakening are hard to put into words, in the second chapter it was suggested that these moments are rooted in affect and are therefore pre-linguistic. I have also suggested that awakening would entail the creation of a new subjectivity that arises from the movement between words and silence. I would like to offer here that awakening is related to haunting since the very process of transformation entails the prospect of potentiality, but seen from a non dual, a-temporal approach it is a movement towards what is already there. Awakening is thus always becoming and has always already been. At the same time it entails openness to the otherness of one’s subjectivity, and the otherness of language that participates in the creation of the Self. Richard Kearney’s discussion of ‘persona’ might be useful at this stage.

Influenced by writers such as Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Emanuel Levinas, Kearney offers his answer to the question:”What God comes after metaphysics?” Kearney’s conception of divinity is “much closer than the old deity of metaphysics and scholasticism to the God of desire and promise.”¹⁵⁷ Rather than seeing

¹⁵⁷ Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be : A Hermeneutics of Religion*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

God as a deity, as present in time and space, Kearney suggested we read it as possibility. Correspondingly, Kearney suggests that each person can be transfigured, and in fact already embodies a *persona* which is the aura of transformation informing one's being. The eschatological notion of *persona* is "the irreducible finality of the other as eschaton" rather than telos. It exists here as an end without end that escapes and surprises us."¹⁵⁸ The notion of *persona* echoes the idea of haunting as it implies change towards something that has always already existed. It is thus ontologically absent but at the same time is in continuous present. Like haunting, the notion of *persona* cannot be described as merely presence or absence, life or death, subject and object. However, it does offer the possibility of transformation in a somewhat different way. Levinas' emphasis on ethics, the priority of the other before myself, and the importance of accepting the Other as Other without reducing her to the category of the same¹⁵⁹ are essential to Kearney's understanding of transformation.

Persona stands not only for the possibility of our own eschatological transformation, but also for "the otherness of the other." It requires accepting the other as both flesh and transcendent in time. If Derrida described deconstruction as a response to call, a vocation to open the alterity of language,¹⁶⁰ in Kearney, 'persona' becomes an answer to the Other and the necessity to accept the Other as 'persona.' Understanding awakening through the concept of 'persona' establishes it as potentiality rather than as an

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; an Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh,: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

¹⁶⁰ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 118.

event, and as a response to a call that requires openness and meeting. The ‘persona’ Kearney explains, is hard to grasp since it is ineffable—it defies the names and categories of signifying consciousness. In fact, it is beyond consciousness altogether. However, Kearney adds, “this ‘beyond-ness’ is, curiously what spurs language to speak figuratively about it, deploying imagination and interpretation to overreach their normal limits in efforts to grasp it—especially in the guise of metaphor and narrative.”¹⁶¹ The idioms of “already,” “prior,” “before,” and “after” signal for Kearney a new kind of ethical temporality in which one responds to the call of the ‘persona’ and in the proximity of the other from a time without time, before my beginning and after the end.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has surveyed different models of language, focusing on the current crisis of representation and the perception of language as constitutive and haunting. Drawing on Foucault’s archeological analysis of Western culture we can see changes in the perceptions and functions of language in Western culture. During the Renaissance, language operated according to the organizing principal of similitude and words kept referring to other words and things in the world in an endless process of reflection. During the Enlightenment, order becomes the dominant principal and words are no longer intertwined with things and a distinction between form and order is established. Words are expected to mirror thought and objects that are perceived to assume their distinct identity. Within this episteme analytic thought and distinct fields of knowledge

¹⁶¹ ———, *The God Who May Be : A Hermeneutics of Religion*, 12.

are developed. Criticism also begins to assume importance but the aspiration is nevertheless for accurate representation, balance between form and content and transparency of representation. Descartes' image of the mind as a mirror and Locke's aspiration for perfect understanding in communication are examples of the line of thought in the episteme of representation.

From the nineteenth century and up until the linguistic turn, the dyad relation between original and its representation prevalent since Plato begins to crumble. Following such writers as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty and others, the epistemic endeavor to represent the world is challenged. Words are no longer considered as signifying other things in the world and some originary presence, but as referring back to other terms in an endless chain of signification. Language is no longer seen as linear but as contextual. Since things do not assume a distinct identity and since language is seen as always partial and selective, it is also understood as rhetorical. Descartes' metaphor of the mind as a mirror is replaced with understanding of the mind as embodied, enfolded in the world, and as necessarily imaginative. The mind does not represent the world but rather co-creates it based on input it receives from the body, the environment, and language use. Moreover, the mind is not seen as an organ that can be located in one's brain isolated from the outside world and is understood to be inter-subjective and inter-textual. Accordingly, the aspiration for perfect understanding is considered an ideological trap, and ideals and values are increasingly understood as aesthetic creation. In other words, language is no longer seen as representative but as constructing perceptions, thought, and even the Self and subjective experiences such as

mystical ones. Ineffability is now understood to be engrained to the very use of language and its reductive nature. Research in cognitive science further suggests that ineffability is grounded in affect, and it therefore precedes words rather than transcends them. For that reason, strong emotional experiences are physically experienced before any awareness of a Self which experiences them.

The change in the linguistic models meant corresponding changes in the understanding of subjectivity. Under the episteme of representation and metaphysics of presence, God was inevitably imagined as an ideal Being, while man was seen as his shadow, his representation. In modern and postmodern thought, there is no longer a belief in progression towards a telos. It is the time of ‘the death of God’ as the transcendental signifier, and the ‘birth of the author.’ Man is born as a subject, as the one who assigns meaning but at the same time it is also understood to be as constructed through language games, aesthetics, style and activity in the world. Rather than assuming a stable identity, the Self is considered more fluid, the flow of the ever changing masks and symbols one wears.

Although the discussion touched on ancient Eastern theories which raised similar ideas to these raised by some post-structural writers thousands of years ago, I have focused my summary on Western philosophy and especially, Jacques Derrida and his critique of logocentrism. I have noted the connection between Derrida’s *différance* and the Buddhist *sunyata* that are always “under erasure,” deployed for tactical reasons but denied any semantic or conceptual stability. According to David Loy, the purpose of both terms is helping us “let go” of conceptual thinking, and the Self’s impossible effort to

ground oneself for the fear of not being real. The idiom of haunting was discussed as a dialectics of presence and absence, as an attempt to open up to the otherness of language, of what haunts every culture. I suggested that haunting's special temporality, as not merely negation, or a pose but rather a continuous presence of what is/not already there is especially relevant for understanding awakening. Haunting's special aesthetics as a play of shadows, and mystery, which evokes longing was also discussed as relevant for understanding the construction of awaking. Kearney's notion of 'persona' in which one responds to one's otherness, and the otherness of the other was also used in this context. This introduced awakening as an ineffable potentiality rather than an event and as an intersubjective process rather than a solitary one.

In the next chapters the concept of awakening and the rhetoric of ineffability will be examined in the contexts of three different religions and their respective rhetorical traditions. Following the ideas surveyed in this chapter it would be imperative to examine the relations between expression and experience—the ways in which the canonical texts inform and shape the particular awakening experiences and the ways in which these experiences were in turn constructed. As the fallacy of logocentrism and metaphysics of presence are considered by Derrida as mostly European constructs, this dissertation would examine whether awakening and haunting are expressed differently across religious traditions (i.e., those that believe in God and a soul and those who do not.)

CHAPTER 3: CREATING THE WORLD- MARTIN BUBER'S TSHUVA AND JEWISH RHETORIC

This chapter rhetorically analyzes Martin Buber's awakening. Since Buber's discursive moves are greatly informed by his spiritual practice, especially the Jewish tradition, I contextualize them within the relevant hermeneutic and theoretical traditions. This is in accord with the general thesis of this dissertation, in which the hermeneutic tradition shapes the rhetorical choices and thus the experience of the individual. The chapter begins with background information on the status of language and ineffability in Judaism. I then address the concept of awakening as it is understood within the Hassidic tradition which informed Buber's writings. Finally, I analyze Buber's various autobiographical accounts of awakening, focusing on his autobiographical chapter "A Conversion" from the book *Meetings*.¹

Ineffability and Awakening in Judaism

Language as Transformation

Both the discussion on ineffability and the discussion on awakening are rare in Judaism. While a goal of Christian mysticism is to surpass language in order to reach the acme of mysticism, the Hebrews understood reality to be divinely verbal and saw no need to transcend it. In contrast to traditions that perceive language as a hindrance to the awareness of God and "the upper worlds," Jewish mystics consider language as an aspect of creation and as an important tool for transformation. Therefore, the problem of

¹ Buber, *Meetings*.

ineffability does not preoccupy Jewish mystics and, in fact, 'ineffability' as a term does not even exist in Hebrew.

The premise of the dominant theory regarding the insufficiency of language is that language is arbitrary and is a human convention. As such, it is ill-suited for describing ultimate reality. However, this premise is not relevant for Hebrew which is believed to be a sacred language. In Greek, a word or *onoma*, is taken to be an arbitrary sign or a name which points to the real thing outside of language. In contrast, Hebrew takes *davar* to be not only a *word* but also *thing*. This did not mean that the physical object itself was considered to be identical to the word which designated it, but for the Hebrew mind, the essential reality was the word of God. Rabinowitz further explains that 'reality' is a far more appropriate term than a *thing*, since it does not evoke the same connotations of *substance* and *being* (res).² The essential contrast between a sign and a thing did not exist. There was, therefore, no hierarchy between them nor was one considered superior to the other.

Unlike Greek thought - in which the movement was from a word to a thing - in Hebrew, there is no movement from the arbitrary sign towards an image of a thing outside the text. The movement is rather from the thing to the word which does *not* represent it but creates it and sustains it. Here, word does not have an indexing but a performative function. Katz borrows a term from Heideggerian hermeneutic, to explain

² Isaac Rabinowitz, "'Word' and Literature in Ancient Israel," *New Literary History* 4, no. 119-130 (1972), Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

that the Hebrew word is not 'sign' (Zeichen) but to 'to show' (Zeigen).³ Handelman explains that *The word of God* was more than the act of saying, it was a creative force: a concentration of power enabling the manifestation of realities.⁴ It is also important to emphasize that God's name is not meant to represent an entity. The name itself has an ontological power and the capacity to transform one's mind and level of realization.⁵

One of the consequences of the cleavage between a word and a thing, in Greek thought, was the need to transcend language toward the things it was meant to represent. Handelman emphasizes that, in the central doctrine of the Church, incarnation celebrates not the exaltation of the word but its transformation from the linguistic to the material order.⁶ The Greek desire was to move from the invisible to the seen—the concept of thought was understood in the visual terms of an image and, as Aristotle claimed, words were considered the likeness of things. Jesus, therefore, functioned as a physical image of God and a mediator between the invisible and the sensible reality; he was both a *word* and a *thing*. The Hebrew God, however, was not silently suffering but was understood through speaking and interpreting. He was apprehended not through seeing but through the text, the "divine word."

³ Moshe Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁴ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

⁵ Steven T. Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Language," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁶ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

As opposed to the subordination of the spoken word to the written word in Christianity, Judaism considers the letters themselves as sacred⁷. The Hebrew alphabet does not serve, in any way, as a channel for transmitting meaning. The letters are rather conceived as creative elements that enable different types of communication, even nonverbal ones, which accomplish more than conveying trivial information. Rabbinic thought, which developed independently from Western metaphysics, called for more intense concentration on the words - including the physical shapes of the letters, their punctuation and even the space between them. Jewish mystics further believed that the Hebrew language plays a role much more important than the common communicative one regularly played by language. After the temple was destroyed, prayers replaced the ritual and—according to important conceptions of Jewish mysticism—the Jews constantly create the temple and the divine connection with God through daily prayers and the study of the Torah. The letters themselves are regarded as physical components for building an edifice for God and they serve as a platform for the mystic for encountering him⁸. For this reason, the act of meditation and the manipulation of God's names are for the kabbalists “a theurgic, meditative, and transformative act made possible by the *necessary* link between it and its transcendental source/Object.”⁹

The theurgical and contemplative manipulation of letters—and the conception of language as full-fledged entities that participate in the process of creation—appear in Sefer Yezira, the most important Jewish mystical text (after the Bible.) Idel explains that

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," 46.

⁹ Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Language," 16.

according to the view formed in this book, language is not only the archetype of the world but is also its stuff.

Twenty –two letters are the foundation: he engraved them, He hewed them out. He combined them, He weighed them, and He set them at opposites, and He formed through them everything that is formed and everything that is destined to be formed.¹⁰

God shares with humans the unique capacity of creation through language as a gift of grace. Like the God in whose image humans were created , humans can replicate the act of creation through linguistic activity.¹¹ The idea of linguistic creation is recycled in Kabbalah and nicely reflected in the story of the *Golem*,¹² the Frankenstein creature that is created from raw material or clay and becomes a servant to its creator. It is the act of speaking that endows the Golem with a soul and it is a certain combination of letters that can annihilate it. This narrative illustrates the understanding of language as a source of a real cosmological and transformative power. In the next section I examine the ways in which the above understanding of language in Judaism—as creative rather than mimetic—has shaped the hermeneutics of this tradition.

Jewish Hermeneutics

In the same way that language is not meant to represent external things, the Biblical narrative is not meant to represent a reality or tell a story. On the contrary, the Old Testament is intentionally mysterious and demanding multiple and subtle

¹⁰ Sefer Yezira, Chapter 2, Mishnah 2

¹¹ Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism."

¹² In some tales the Golem is inscribed with magical letters such as one of God's names or the word Emet (truth) that keep it animated. By deleting the first letter from its forehead, the Golem ia be left with the letters "met" ("dead".) Thus, manipulation of letters can produce and eradicate a magical being, while the ability to speak is associated with having a soul and life.

interpretations that are inextricably connected with the physical aspect of the narrative.¹³ Auerbach compares the Homeric narrative which has no concealment or hidden meaning to the Biblical narrative.¹⁴ While the Homeric text can be analyzed, he explains, it cannot be interpreted. Handelman compares the movement towards an externalized and realist visibility, which Auerbach describes in the Homeric narrative, to the way in which the sign functions in Greek thought—as pointing beyond itself. In comparison, the Biblical text does not point to external images and forms but inwards towards itself.¹⁵

The language and text therefore operate as a multilayered and intertextual system, in which exegesis takes part. Since the text and language do not point outwards to the thing, exegesis in Judaism is not used as formula for uncovering the ‘signified’, the ‘real meaning’ of a text. In fact, exegesis has the same value of generative capacity as the text itself. According to the Rabbinic view, the written scriptures (including the Talmud, Mishna and Gemara) are intentionally incomplete and are meant to be accompanied and supplemented by the oral Torah. The text and its interpretation are therefore not seen as two different entities but as aspects of the same revelation. The boundaries between text and interpretation in Judaism are very fluid in spite of, or because of, the sacredness of the text. One example is the unprecedented way in which commentary has, over time, taken primacy over the original text. Like the written Torah, the Mishna and Talmud are not seen as complete and finished products but as basic texts for generations to come.

¹³ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 30.

¹⁴ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

¹⁵ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

Even the rules are not simply given, but contain long arguments and disputes, which will be taken up and reinterpreted later on. In these texts, every phrase encompasses a whole world, serves as an indication and reference to an argument or train of thought, and can be interpreted in multiple ways. The texts themselves are intertextual - not only in their references to different sections of the text(s) but also in the physical way in which each page contains the original text and the different commentary given to it throughout the years.¹⁶

The relentless search for explanations can be related to the linguistic and metaphysical system in Judaism. Handelman relates the important differences to the principle of universals versus particulars. Aristotle criticized the profusion of words used by rhetoricians and emphasized scientific logic that is based on acceptance of certain underlying premises. The true philosopher should find universal truths that were imparted by divinity and that function primarily according to the principal of form. While the focus for the Greeks was on universal truths, in Biblical thought all was contingent, including all premises. There were no natural laws and rationally deduced self-evident laws. Everything could have been otherwise. The relentless skepticism of the rabbis, explains Handelman, manifested in an inexorable search for explanations and alternative explanations. Rather than looking for universal truths, rabbinic exegesis focused on the particular differences: on the minute and, seemingly, the most mundane details.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

Therefore, rabbinic hermeneutics prefers the particular and the concrete over the abstract and the general. But due to the doctrine of monotheism there is also a belief in the unified force of all things; the minute details are always interconnected to the whole. Unlike Greek logic the connection between the particular and the general is not formulated in terms of classes; rather they are seen as different aspects of prepositions that are defined in terms of extension and limitation of the textual process. The relation is based on metonymic logic, in which the general is not a universal and abstract law nor does it subsume the particular but, rather, is its extension. The general and the particular are not opposite of each other; they are always interdependent, in a fluid manner, within the textual process.

Handelman gives the example of an argumentative law called *kal vachomer* - literally, 'from the light to the heavy.' The rule was applied in the thirteen "midot"—exegesis that expanded on the rules of Beth Hillel, and were later incorporated into the morning prayers. The rule is often confused with Aristotelian syllogism, because it is an argument a fortiori, which draws a conclusion from a minor premise, or a more lenient condition, to a major or stricter one, and vice versa. However, *kal-vachomer* was not concerned with the relation of classes, but with sentences. The relation between the major to the minor was not based on identity, but on the principle of juxtaposition. It is the metaphoric logic as formulated by Ricoeur and the rhetoric of haunting which was discussed in the second chapter. Since *kal vachomer* establishes a condition, it describes something that both is, and is not, existing on the boundary of the same and the different always remains as a possibility. While the common understanding of metaphor and

interpretation in Christianity is transference, the movement here is based on juxtapositions that avoid positing identities and predicates.¹⁸

In the classic example of the syllogism: “All men are mortal, Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal” the important step is to show that Socrates belongs to the general class of man. Handelman translates the *kal vachomer* to the same formula and explains that the important step here is not to show that Y belongs to class X. The goal is to show that Y is like X (only more so), and therefore if X has Z, then Y has Z also, not that Y is X is Z.¹⁹ The verb ‘being,’ which establishes concrete identity is not used as the relation between the predicates, is not based on inclusion. The relation between the predicates is based on perceptions of similarities and differences. The focus on contingencies, relations and differences is therefore essential to rabbinic thought.

Handelman claims that, while Christianity is predominantly lexical and metaphorical, the Rabbinic thought may be characterized as metonymical and propositional. In Greco-Roman understanding, metaphoric thought depends on identification and then the transferring of one word or name for another. Once identity of each word is established, metaphoric thought depends on substitution of one for another. In rabbinic thought all is contingent on one another and the relations between things is not of identities but of differences and similarities. In same manner, textual interpretations do not substitute one another or the literal text but they add to it—all levels of meaning seemingly exist. This is, again, another element of haunting - in which

¹⁸ Ibid., 50-55.

¹⁹ Ibid., 53.

multiple layers of meanings that were generated at different times keep reverberating and enrich one another. Every word and every thought has many levels of interpretations without each one cancelling another. Truth is therefore not simple and ultimate, but always subject to interpretation. It is not finite, but is always generated; it is a process.

The metonymic logic operates even in the definition of a word. In Greek thought, understanding of language depends on representation in a visual manner. Words are likenesses of things- they are seen as copies or images. Language is understood as a visible sign that points to an invisible referent outside the text. The highest order of language within this system is abstract, where an abstract seeing is removed from the particular referent. The sign, however, always remains separate from the thing. In Hebrew, as we have seen, “word and thing are interconnected and in place of representation there is a grasped reality.”²⁰ Because there is no division between the general and the particular, they are imbedded within each other; the relation is not based on replacement, but on contiguity. While Aristotelian metaphorical resemblance is based on a notion of mathematical equivalence, Rabbinic thought is based on a contiguous narrative, and intertextual, multilayered system.²¹ This same logic has many implications and is manifested in other rhetorical tropes that are unique to Hebrew and rabbinic exegesis.

In sum, the Torah exists as an all-embracing unity at the basis of things, and all aspects of reality can be seen as ramifications of that. Everything is interconnected in

²⁰ Ibid., 62.

²¹ Ibid., 63.

multiple different ways, and nothing is left outside of its scope; nothing is irrelevant. Commentary is not forced on the text and there is essentially no outside point of view. The text continues to develop each time it is studied; each layer of interpretation is considered an extension of the text. This can further explain why ineffability - that by its very definition presumes the existence of something beyond the textual - does not mesh with the Jewish logic. For Jewish thought, the text contains everything including the multiple ways in which it is interpreted. Even the silences and gaps, which are considered external in the Christian tradition, are studied as an integral part of the text, just like the letters. Accordingly, rabbinic thought can be characterized according to Handelman by metonymical logic, as retaining differences between identities and as stressing relations of contiguity instead of identities, a play of 'as if' rather than the assertions of 'is,' juxtapositions over equivalences and universal truths, and preference for particulars over universals. It is therefore closer to the Derridian stress on differance and the logic haunting, in which multiple layers of meaning can coexist while pointing to one another, rather than to a transcendental signifier which exists outside the text. These tropes will be used not for exegesis, but expression in Martin Buber's awakening narratives.

Awakening in Judaism

For various reasons, mystical experiences and awakening autobiographies were also seldom discussed in Jewish spirituality. One reason is that although Hebrew is a sacred language, with the power to grasp supernatural reality—or even manifest it—due to historical circumstances, it was reserved for religious writing and was not used in daily

life. Therefore it did not develop the vernacular required for expressing one's intimate feelings and fantasies.²²

Another reason for the scarcity of mystical accounts—which is related to the characteristic of the Hebrew language described above—is the propensity of the Jewish tradition for objectivist types of discourse. Erich Euerbach had already commented that the Bible is less concerned with depicting the internal landscape, favoring external action instead.²³ This does not mean, Idel argues, that Judaism is disdainful towards intimate feelings, but rather that the culture is focused on the community, as it is shaped by common denominators, which are religiously oriented. This approach was adopted by the two main modes of the rabbinic literature: the Midrashic-interpretive and Halakhic-legislative. Both threads expand on and interpret things crucial for the Bible without indulging in emotionally inclined writing. It is not that mystical experiences did not exist, but they did not come to the forefront until medieval times.

Another important factor contributing to the scarcity of mystical accounts is the emphasis permeating Biblical thought on the collective Jewish personality.²⁴ Judaism defines religion by birth rather than by rite and the salvation of the Jewish people is not a personal salvation, but a nationalistic, collective one.²⁵ The identity of the individual is therefore shaped by his or her role in the community and the well-being of the community is interdependent and crucial for the personal well-being. This is reflected in

²² Mendes-Flohr, "Introduction," 198-9.

²³ Moshe Idel, "Preface," in *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets. Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Morris M. Faierstein (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

²⁴ The collective Jewish personality is often described as God's wife. Ibid.

²⁵ Charles S. Liebman and Eli ezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

the central Jewish prayer said on Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement) in which the community repeats “*we* have committed sin,” rather than “*I* have committed sin.” Since the concept of self has been inextricably connected and interdependent to that of the Collective, personal testimonies have been of lesser concern than relevant themes of Jewish theosophy.

This might also be related to the contingent and intertextual function of the Hebrew language. We have seen in the second chapter that the mimetic understanding of language leads to understanding of things as having an independent existence. In such a linguistic episteme, the Self is similarly constructed as an independent being that develops from an origin towards its fruition. This view is very much related to a linear conception of time that was not characteristic of Jewish thought, which emphasized contingencies, juxtapositions and reverberations of time into the present, instead. The connection between the personal and the collective can, similarly, be understood as dependent on the logic of contingency: the two are interwoven without one cancelling the other.

Emphasis on the collective and rational writing is observed in Lynn Davidman’s study. In her ethnographic research on the process of transformation in *baalot teshuva* (Jewish women who turned to an orthodox and Hassidic life style), she found that most of the women interviewed did not have ‘religious experience.’ Moreover, these women expressed uncertainty and skepticism in regard to the concept and meaning of ‘religious experience.’ Instead, they interpreted their sentiments as expressions of belonging to a larger community. Lynn attributed her findings to the specific context in which her study

was conducted ("yuppies," during the early 1980's, of the Twentieth Century), as well as to the Jewish focus on Halacha (law) and community, rather than emotional and religious experiences.²⁶

An expansion of literature dealing with inner states of mind emerged, however, in various schools of Jewish philosophy in different areas in which Jews were located, but even then, the teachers and students alike did not confess the details of their attainment. Greater emphasis on personal experience can be found in the ecstatic Kabbalah (and the Hassidic movement), due to a few reasons: The first is the messianic and redemptive nature of the school. Its founder, Abraham Damuel Abulafia (1240-c-1292) believed himself to be the Messiah, a concept that he understood as involving a more personal experience than external redemption. The second impulse for producing more autobiographical and mystical writings was rhetorical. Apparently, personal testimonies were shared in order to compete with the attraction of Jewish philosophy and the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. Individual experiences were shared as a way to provide testimony and gain recognition in the new mystical path.²⁷

In recent times, a new phenomenon of Jewish people, in Israel and elsewhere, who turn to ultra-orthodox forms of Judaism has become more prevalent. However, those who follow this route and radically transform, tend to shy away from secular communities. These ultra-orthodox communities are extremely hard to reach and even as some individuals share their conversion stories in public the emphasis remains on

²⁶ Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World : Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

²⁷ Idel, "Preface."

presentation of the Jewish teachings in a new light rather than on detailed description of their own personal experience. Autobiographies written on the topic are very rare and, in fact, I am not aware of any autobiographical narrative documenting awakening experience of the type required for this dissertation.

Indeed, very few mystical accounts exist in Judaism, and those published were concerned with one's transmigrations, dreams, and the growing importance of the charismatic figure guiding the individual Kabbalist in the religious life ("tzadic"). Martin Buber's account of his own awakening is *not* of a mystical nature, nor does it describe the process of 'tshuve' in the sense of becoming more orthodox. His story was nevertheless chosen for this dissertation since it is an autobiographical account with a retrospective gaze that is rare in the Jewish tradition. While Buber's conversion can be read as a movement from mysticism to universal Humanism, his approach is informed by Jewish writings and Hassidic scriptures and to some extent by other traditions as well. Since Hassidic philosophy has influenced Buber's views, more background on awakening in Hassidism is needed.

Awakening in Hassidism

The concept prevalent in Judaism to discuss personal transformation is "a change of heart" or "*tshuva*" which literally means "answer" or to 'return,' to turn to one's path. Colloquially, the term has come to refer to a Jew who turns to a more orthodox life-style; however, the term is not necessarily limited to that. The concept of '*tshuva*' points to a radical change and is related in Jewish thought to percept and sin and not to

enlightenment. The important Jewish philosopher, Harambam, explains that *tshuva* should derive from understanding one's sin and emanate from a deep and sincere regret about the past. It manifests in confession, and is expressed as a change in one's actual way of life²⁸. Since Buber's understanding of '*tshuva*' is influenced by the Hassidic understanding of the term, a few words on Hassidism as a movement are required.

Although Hassidim has become a very insular and conservative movement that resists modernity, it started up as a populist and spiritual group in the Eighteenth century. It emerged at a point of religious crisis and offered a new form of spirituality to the poor masses. The movement was led by the Baal Shem Tov, a mystical healer and teacher who offered an emotional ecstasy and direct connection to God rather than the philosophical and hermeneutic discussions normally practiced in Judaism. Hassidism taught that divinity can be found anywhere, including everyday activities such as eating and drinking, embodied piety through singing and dancing, or even through isolation and concentrated (*kavana*) prayer. However, this reality can be seen only by the most devoted of followers who are not taken by the superficial appearance of things.

Instead of collective redemption and transformation, Hassidism emphasized an individual redemption through "dvekut" ("cleavage") to God—an unmediated experience of divinity that is free of egoism and vanity that separate humans from The Holy One. The focus on individual redemption and pantheism led to reinterpretation of messianic connotations such as "Israel" or the "Holy temple" that were now interpreted as personal

²⁸ יד החזקה. " -הרמבם, " הלכות תשובה

unity and wholeness. Even the ten holy spheres of the theosophical Kabbalah were read by most of the Spiritual leaders of the Hassidism as discussing also inner states of mind.²⁹

The concept of *tshuva* in Hassidism is in accordance with their more general framework of thinking, the varied influences of Kabbala and other scriptures. In concert with the important Kabbalistic book, *The Zohar*, Hassidism differentiates between different levels of awakening. The more mundane and lower one would merely be a change in one's life style and ethics. It refers to repentance of sin and an appropriate change in one's way of life. The higher *tshuva* (*tshuva eila*) is a process of deep inner change in consciousness and spirit. In it, one is perceived to return one's actions to the higher root which is God and the source and origin of all deeds. In Hassidism, the divine is perceived to ontologically exist before the duality of good and evil. In the divine, all is one—all is sacred and good. When an individual gives one's consciousness back to the root of all things, the dichotomy between things is naturally cancelled and one is able to recognize that everything—including the bad actions that made one want to transform—are divine. When the soul goes back to its root, the false separation between the acting man and God is cancelled and one can see that everything that had happened was the result of the divine will and had therefore been a spiritual obligation ("mitzvah").³⁰ Chazal had even radically claimed that conversion transforms transgressions into rights.

²⁹ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism : Between Ecstasy and Magic*, Suny Series in Judaica (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

³⁰ Ohad Ezrachi, "On Conversion in Judaism and Zen."

Hazadok explains 'tshuva' as a process of consciously exploring and understanding—in the root of his soul and the depth of free will—the existence of God.³¹ The change breaks ontological dichotomies such as God and man, good and evil, sacred and profane, forbidden and allowed. The ordinary perception according to which man should reach an objective and divine truth is replaced by the understanding that everything happens according to God's will. This will is not external but immanent and its source is one's free will³². When this understanding is not merely theoretical but is based on a profound understanding, one's worldview changes completely. Zadok referred to this change as enlightenment.

Rabbi Zusya had made the acronym of *tshuva* into a clear path of five didactic stages. In modern English these would be the equivalence of honesty and simplicity; equanimity; commitment to loving kindness and love for the other; work of God through all actions; humility and humanity. The second principle was interpreted by The Baal Shem as indicating the necessity of equanimity so that all people and all actions are equally as good—being scolded or praised, eating delicacies or other things—for everything one does is for the sake of heaven. The third stage, "be-loving to your neighbor (as one) like yourself", that was declared by Rabbi Hillel as the Torah's most important teaching is understood in this context as all equal and everyone is as important as oneself is realized. According to the fourth stage in the acronym, God can and should be worked in all ways. This realization is related to the dimension of equanimity.

³¹ ק. תוא', vol. צדקת העדייקרבי צדוק הכהן מלובלין,

³² Ezrachi, "On Conversion in Judaism and Zen."

The belief that all actions are equally divine and important pending on the kavan (intention) given to them is reflected in the following Hassidic tale:

Rabbi Pinchas of Kuritz said: The ten spheres are manifested in any action or deed, because they fill up the entire universe. No speech is itself nonsense, and no deed is useless. But one can turn a speech and deed into nonsense when you mindlessly perform them.³³

In another tale Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk asked one of his disciples: “What was most important to your teacher?” The disciple thought and then replied: “Whatever he happened to be doing at the moment.”³⁴ The focus remains on the particulars and contingency—all actions are important and since everything is interrelated everything is meaningful. The Hassidic addition is on the importance of volition (kavana) in the performance of these actions. The last two elements of Hassidism were emphasized by Buber in his selection of Hassidic tales and were compared by him to Zen teachings.

In sum, Awakening or *tshuva* in Hassidism involves deep psychological transformation wherein duality is dissolved and one understands the unity of the divine. Therefore, sacred and profane, good and bad are not relevant as external obligations. Rather, one focuses on cleavage and the direct experience of God. All is equal and all ways of life can be pious if done with kavana (intention.) At this stage, one understands divinity not as an external obligation but as an imminent one. This understanding is not merely theoretical but is the basis of the Hassidic piety and is reflected in their writings and performative actions. These ideas and the ways in which they are presented in the

³³ Ibid., 125, Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. Olga Marx, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1961).

³⁴ Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*.

Hassidic tales and writings maintain the metonymic logic and the focus on contingencies and particulars. These ideas inform and are reflected in Buber's awakening experience. The discursive moves that emerged in his testimonies of awakening are: the use of dialogic structure, Hassidic tales and Jewish terms, contingency of time and language, focus on differences, conditions, haunting, silence and intertextuality. I begin, however, by describing the actual process of Martin Buber's transformation.

Martin Buber's Awakening

The Process

Buber's awakening marks a change from his mystical inclination and aspiration for transcendence and ecstasy to what has come to be his unique dialogic approach. Avraham Shapira who spent most of his academic career studying Buber's texts, classifies his transformation as one of an ethical nature.³⁵ Shapira clarifies that in most of Buber's explicit or implicit references to his awakening, the change was viewed as a gradual process. In one of these references Buber recounts going through a long transformation and achieving some clarity, in 1918. The process was later interpreted by Buber as a gradual enlightenment and growing clarity: I can describe what has happened to me merely as a process of clarification;...³⁶

The difficulties of the war are mentioned in several occasions as steering the desire for change and for setting the shift towards his dialogic approach: "What happened

³⁵ Avraham Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, Suny Series in Judaica (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

³⁶ Cited in, *Ibid.*, 85.

to me was that all the experiences of being that I had during the years 1912-1919 became present to me in growing measure as *one* great experience of faith,..."³⁷

Elsewhere he writes,

The grace of a relationship with the world that I did not attain except after long and complex wanderings, by means of decisive personal experiences. These experiences, which began in the first year of the war and ended a year after it, brought me from a hidden sphere of time and language to the sphere of the hour, between one chime of the clock and another..³⁸

Several tragedies and the death of his close friend were identified by Buber and historians as apex moments in his gradual process of change.

On some occasions and especially in the chapter "A Conversion" Buber chooses to construct his experience as rapid and immediate. The title "A Conversion" already suggests a dramatic turning point rather than a gradual process. The chapter has three parts: the first part characterizes the mystical stage of Buber's life; the second describes a meeting with a young man who later died in the war; the last section embodies the features of Buber's newly developed dialogic conception. The chapter creates the impression that Buber's awakening was rapid and instigated due to the shock of the young man's death. Although Buber had welcomed the young man with respect, his premature death reframed the meeting, filled Buber with remorse and led to his change.

In short, although Buber's transformation was a gradual one, he chose to present it as a dramatic conversion instigated by a meeting. This rhetorical choice was not

³⁷ as cited in, *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸ Martin Buber, "Translation of the Bible. Its Intentions and Paths," in *Darko Shel Mikra* (Jerusalem: 1964), 349.

random and served Buber in the performative aspect of his theory and the importance of dialogue--this point will be elaborated in the next section of the chapter.

Dialogue

In his early life Buber's interest in religion was mainly mystical. This was reflected in his collection of *Ecstatic Confessions* by mystics of various cultures and times (1909) and in a variety of other mystical writings and literature.³⁹ Buber's interest in mysticism was not only theoretical but stemmed out of his own mystical practice—his main source of influence was the fashionable spirituality of his time that was monistic and pantheistic, a godless mysticism. His group of friends believed that suffering can be eliminated by experiencing the unity of all things. Greatly influenced by this theory, Buber emphasized in his earlier writings the universal nature of realization and the oneness of all.⁴⁰

A predominant theme in his writings, and especially in his book *Ecstatic Confessions*, was the ineffable quality of the mystical experience. Buber used to read the mystery that cannot be classified or understood as a key to human understanding: "what is important to us is that which remains beyond explanation: the individual's experience....we are listening to a human being speak of the soul and of the soul's ineffable mystery." "Perhaps," claims Buber "this inner experience is specifically what is beyond, because prior to outer experience. I am the dark side of the moon; you know of

³⁹ See for example, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (1906), *The Legend of the Baal Shem* (1908), *Ecstatic Confessions* (1909), *The saying and parables of Chung Tzu* (1910), *Chinese Ghost Yales and love stories* (1911), *Kalevala: The National Epic of Finland*; and *The Four Branches of Mabinogi: A Celtic Book of Legends* (1914).

⁴⁰ Mendes- Flohr, "Intorduction."

my existence, but what you establish concerning the bright side is not valid for me.”⁴¹

Buber equates here mysticism with exceptionality and a momentary ineffable experience in which one is taken beyond the world of individuation. Although he rejected mysticism as a flight from the world, his mysticism remained a unique and individual moment. This moment was perceived to be a very personal experience, a “religious solipsism.” His view of mysticism and language was not influenced by Jewish teachings but probably by European Christianity and the Eastern religions to which his group of friends and he were exposed.

The chapter “A Conversion” marks Buber’s transition from the pantheist to a dialogic approach. As was previously mentioned, he began to crystallize his dialogic theory during First World War I and first published it in 1923, in what became his most famous book, *I and Thou*. His new theory posited dialogue as a symbol of Man’s relation to the ‘Other’ or to God at the center of Life. Religion was no longer perceived to be a solipsistic moment beyond ordinary life. Rather, true life was to be realized in the matrix of everyday life and the willingness to meet whatever confronts us without hindrances or preconceived ideas. In contrast to his pantheistic mysticism, dialogue is grounded in a belief in a theistic, personal God - whose active relation to man does not obscure the ontological or “primal distance between *I and Thou*.”⁴² After his awakening, Buber does not express longing for the unity and the fusion of individual personality, and even describes mysticism as dialogic. The notion of dialogue emerges in Buber’s testimonies

⁴¹ Martin Buber and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Ecstatic Confessions : The Heart of Mysticism*, 1st Syracuse University Press ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), xxxii.

⁴² Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York,: Scribner, 1970).

as central to his awakening, due to the use he makes of specific metaphors, terms, Hassidic tales, and the narrative framework of ‘meetings.’ Dialogue is constructed in Buber’s writings, not only as an end product, but as a creative force that framed and shaped his awakening.

In the following implicit reference to his transformation, Buber attributes his change to the historical, social background of the time and emphasizes the growing acknowledgment of the importance of unmediated meetings:

During the First World War it became clear to me that a process was progressively taking place, one which I had not noticed earlier except hypothetically; a process of increased difficulty in true dialogue between man and his fellow man; and there was an especially great difficulty in dialogue between people who are different from each other in nature and opinion. Face to face dialogue, without fences and barriers, becomes hard and rare, and the gaps between man and man widen with increasing cruelty, making the danger graver that it will no longer be possible to build a bridge between them. Then, thirty five years ago, my eyes were opened to see that here was the main issue in the destiny of mankind.⁴³

Later in life Buber referred to his awakening in a conversation with Carl Rogers, at the University of Michigan, on 18 April 1957. In answer to his interviewer’s question, “How have you lived so deeply in interpersonal relationships?” Buber shares the locus of his awakening (though he does not define it as such):

It was just a certain inclination to meet people. And as far as possible, to change something in the *other*, but also to let *me* be changed by *him*. At any event, I had no resistance—put no resistance to it. I began as a young man. I felt I have not the right to want to change another if I am not open to be changed by him as far as it is legitimate. Something is to be changed and his touch, his concept[,] is able to change it more or less. I *cannot* be, so to say, above him, and say, “No! I’m out of the play. *You* are mad.” There were two phases of it. The first phase went until the year 1918, meaning until I was about forty. And then I, in 1918, I felt something

⁴³ “Hope for our Hour” (in Hebrew) (1952), in *Am ve’Olam*, p.83. as cited in, Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 88.

rather strange. I felt that I had been strongly influenced by something that came to an end just then, meaning the First World War. In the course of the war, I did not feel very much about this influence. But at the end I felt, “Oh, I have been terribly influenced,” because I could not resist what went on, and I was compelled to, may I say, to live it. Things that went on just at this moment. You may call this *imagining the real*. Imagining what was going on. This imagining, for four years, influenced me terribly. Just when it was finished, it finished by a certain episode in May 1919 when a friend of mine, a great friend, a great man, was killed by the antirevolutionary soldiers in a very barbaric way, and now again once more—and this was the last time—I was compelled to imagine just this killing, but not in an optical way alone, but may I say so, just with my *body*. And this was the decisive moment, after which, after some days and nights in this state, I felt, “Oh, something has been done to me.” And from then on, these meetings with people, particularly with young people were—became—in a somewhat different form. I had a decisive experience, experience of four years, many concrete experiences, and from now on, I had to give something more than just my inclination to exchange thoughts and feeling and so on, I had to give the fruit of an experience.⁴⁴

The willingness to meet is manifested here on a few levels: First, Buber expresses willingness to meet his difficulties in order to experience them wholeheartedly. The will to fully meet life on all its complexities is inextricably related his eagerness to meet others. Importantly, meeting the Other is not expressed merely as the physical action of ‘meeting’ but as a profound readiness to transform and be transformed by the Other. The use of the term ‘meeting’ thus carries multiple meanings which exist simultaneously and enrich one another.

Dialogue is the framework of a meaningful change Buber was going through in the chapter “Question and Answer.” The title points to the importance of a dialogue as well as to the process of ‘conversion’ in Judaism (i.e., tshuva or answer). In the chapter, Buber tells the story of his meeting with his old time friend Heschler. Buber is deeply affected

⁴⁴ Ibid., 88-89.

by Heschler's use of Daniels' prophecy to make the dry declaration about the certainty of a world war in the near future. The phrase 'World War' which Buber had then heard for the first time kept resonating in his mind. To the excitement and bewilderment another question was added—before Heschler would leave he asks: "Dear friend! We live in a great time. Tell me: Do you believe in God?" Upon escorting to Heschler to the train station Buber deeply ponders the question posed to him and the initial answer he had provided:

If to believe in God means to be able to talk about him in the third person. Then I do not believe in God. If to believe in him means to be able to talk to him, then I believe in God... The God who gives Daniel such foreknowledge of this hour of human history, this hour before the 'world war,' that its fixed place in the march of the ages can be foredetermined, is not my God and not God. The God to whom Daniel prays in his suffering is my God and the God of all.⁴⁵

Religious faith is here redefined as a dialogic practice. Buber shifts the focus from belief to practice and from an isolated experience to a relational one. Importantly, the new awareness is described as the product of a dialogue with a friend.

Meeting is also at the heart of Buber's transformation as it is told in the chapter 'A Conversion.' In the chapter, Buber meets a young man and treats him with his usual respect and politeness. "Only," emphasizes Buber in hindsight, "I omitted to guess the questions which he did not put out."⁴⁶ The unuttered questions will be revealed to Buber later when he will find that the man died in the war. Malreaux once said that "the terrible thing about death is that it transforms life into destiny;"⁴⁷ the young man's death changes

⁴⁵ Buber, *Meetings*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁷ David Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996), xix.

something in Buber and reframes their interaction: "I learned that he had come to me not causally, but borne with destiny, not for a chat but for a decision."⁴⁸ The guilt he later felt for not making an extra effort to truly meet and help the young man is implicitly presented in the chapter as the cause for his subsequent 'conversion.' The dialogical structure of a meeting is presented in this case as well as the cause of change; the willingness to meet and respond is the embodiment of Buber's new ethics and spirituality.

Guilt is considered important in the process of awakening in Judaism-- deep regret for one's previous actions and a decision to change are believed to ignite the need to transform. In a paper he wrote on guilt, Buber distinguishes between guilt that is a Christian, theological concept and the Freudian concept of guilt that is considered to be a personal complex that can be analyzed. Buber describes a process that begins with enlightenment, which is exposure to the difficult act or feeling and which ends with atonement. The atonement need not necessarily be directed to the person I have hurt. But through repairing my relationships with others one can atone for his guilt.⁴⁹ Buber's 'conversion' can thus be read as an effort to atone for what he had done to the young man through constituting meaningful relationships with all others.

The rhetorical choice of a meeting which brings together opposing worldviews and spurs a change is repeated in other texts of Buber. The contradiction between the mystical path of the earlier stages of his life, to the dialogic approach he later developed is

⁴⁸ Buber, *Meetings*, 46.

⁴⁹ פני אדם : בחינות באנתרופולוגיה פילוסופית, "מוסד ביאליק", בובר מרדכי מרטין

reflected in the chapter “Of Death and Life” of his *For the Sake of Heaven*.⁵⁰ As in “A Conversion” the chapter has a charismatic spiritual personality facing the test of responding to a person in need. The chapter presents two approaches by the two diametrically opposed figures of the mystic: Holy Yehudi, and that of the Seer of Lublin. These parallel the two aspects of Buber’s life: the charismatic mystic and the one who believes in the responsibility of a dialogue. In the chapter, the Yehudi encounters a sick Jew who is certain of his coming death. “I am about to die...I know I shall die soon,” he tells the Yehudi. It turns out that the man had met with a seer who predicted his death and asked him to get his soul ready for its death. The Yehudi rebelled against the decree of the seer and very gradually he managed to inspire him to restore faith in life. The story echoes a similar story from the Hassidic tradition and encapsulates a contrast that greatly concerned Buber—the contrast between a life based on choice and a deterministic way of life. Buber believed that human freedom was consistent with a dialogical responsiveness to people. This contrasts for him with a mystical way of life which he describes in “A Conversion” and elsewhere as isolated and removed from the world. In Buber’s words:

Since then I have given up the “religious,” which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens. I know no other fullness but each mortal hour’s fullness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I recognize that in the claim I am claimed and respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and who demands a response.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Martin Buber, *For the Sake of Heaven* (New York,: Meridian Books, 1958).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46, Buber, *Meetings*.

Buber distinguishes between what he perceives as solipsistic mysticism to a dialogic approach which he equates with choice and ethics. His use of the term 'respond' is especially meaningful as it points to the relationship between dialogue and responsibility.⁵²

A Hassidic tale might illuminate another dimension of the centrality of dialogue to ethics and subjectivity:

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel was a small child, his grandfather, Rabbi Zalman, held him in his lap and asked the child, "Where is Zeide (grandfather)?" The child touched the grandfather's nose. "No," the rabbi said, "that is Zeide's nose. But where is Zeide?" The child touched the grandfather's beard. "No, that is Zeida's beard. But where is Zeide?" the child climbed down, ran to the next room and shouted, "Zeida!" and Rabbi Zalman went into the room. Gleefully the child pointed, "There is Zeida."⁵³

The message is a powerful one: Zeida is the one that responds when called. Subjectivity is not constructed through ideas or names but in the ability to respond to the call of the Other. Dialogue helps manifest the change and the potential in one's being in both the Hassidic tale and in Buber's various writings.

Buber's presentation of his own 'conversion' and 'tshuva,' as stemming from challenging encounters and a call to respond, are thus in agreement with his theory (even if not with the historical details of his actual transformation). The discursive choice of presenting his conversion through the story of a meeting, enables Buber to equate responsibility and choice with the willingness to meet the fullness of life and the

⁵² That etymological connection between responsibility and response exists in English, Hebrew, German and other languages.

⁵³ Ama Samy, *Zen Heart Zen Mind- the Teachings of Zen Master Ama Sami* (Chennai: Sudarsan Graphics, 2002), 79-80.

roundness of others. Meeting thus becomes inextricably related with an ethical way of life.

Buber emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the context of his awakening in other ways as well. In addition to the use of meeting as a framework leading to his change, Buber uses a variety of metaphors from the Jewish canon which stress the importance of meeting. In the following example, Buber uses an erotic metaphor and dialogic orientation to describe the I-Though relationship:

Here the mystic knows of a close personal intercourse with God...But in erotic intercourse between being and being as in the intercourse between man and God it is still just the duality of these beings which is the elementary presupposition of what passes between them...It is the duality of I and thou.⁵⁴

The erotic metaphor brings to mind the Song of Songs, which is considered the most important Biblical book for Kabbalists. In other occasions, Buber highlights the importance of unmediated communication, through the use of the metaphors of a bridge:

Face to face dialogue, without fences and barriers, becomes hard and rare, and the gaps between man and man widen with increasing cruelty, making the danger graver that it will no longer be possible to build a *bridge*⁵⁵ between them. Then, thirty five years ago, my eyes were opened to see that here was the main issue in the destiny of mankind.⁵⁶

Elsewhere, he describes his own change via the metaphor of a ridge, again pointing to the element of connection between two worlds:

Since my own thoughts over the last things reached, in the First World War, a decisive turning point, I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the “narrow ridge.” I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but

⁵⁴ Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (New York,: Horizon Press, 1960), 173.

⁵⁵ Italics are mine.

⁵⁶ as cited in, Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 88.

on a narrow rocky ridge between the gulfs where there is no sureness of expressible knowledge but the centrality of meeting what remains, undisclosed.⁵⁷

By contrasting the ‘broad upland’ with his own narrow ridge, Buber emphasizes his stepping down from the certainty of [doctrines on] divinity and isolated mysticism and his willingness to live on earth. The metaphor of the bridge is one of the prayers sung on Yom Kippur and it was later taken by Rabbi Nachman, of Breslev, whose stories Buber had compiled in a book: ‘the entire world is a narrow bridge, and the most important thing is to have no fear at all.’ Both Buber’s ridge and Nachman Neuman’s bridge recall the uncertain nature of this world while emphasizing faith – having no fear and being willing to meet ‘whatever remains.’ The view of a bridge or a ridge between two gulfs is also relevant to the central role of meeting and language that connect people and worldviews in Buber’s dialogic theory.

One of the most important influences of on Buber’s rhetoric is the use of Hassidic tales which he compiled in a book and to which he keeps alluding in his testimonies. Buber was often criticized for mystifying Hassidism and for reducing their rich hermeneutic to the Hassidic tales. However, the structure of the tales reflects or inspired his own theory. The tale encapsulates an important message and is conveyed through a meeting between the tzadic and the community. Similarly, Buber’s ideas and especially his explicit written references to his awakening were presented as a tale. The new ideas and way of life Buber developed are shared lessons inspired by meetings. This dialogic

⁵⁷ as cited in, *Ibid.*, 87.

structure mirrors the legendary feel and focus on everyday that is conveyed through the meetings in the Hassidic tales.

The notion of a dialogue is therefore central to Buber's theory and his transformation. Its centrality is conveyed through familiar metaphors of eroticism,, bridge and ridge, allusions to Hassidic tales and a framework of a meeting as a cause for reflection and change. Throughout, Buber's writings are not contained and discrete, but each testimony alludes to familiar concepts and stories from the Jewish tradition and his own past. Intertextuality is a central element in Jewish hermeneutics, which keeps commenting and adding multiple layers of interpretations on the previous ones. Everything is relevant and everything is interconnected. Intertextuality, itself, is a relevant concept to the understanding of meeting as each text is deeply related to all others. Buber's intertextual writing is, therefore, in accord with Jewish hermeneutics and it further supports his dialogic theory.

Language, Dialogue and Ethics

The relation between the ability to respond in the midst of life and ethics is presented also through another type of meeting: the one between the different dimensions of language. At one point Buber comments on his awakening:

These experiences, which began in the first year of the war and ended a year after it, brought me from a hidden sphere of time and language to the sphere of the hour, between one chime of the clock and another. Everything is suspended and directed so that you can hear what is said to you, precisely at this very moment, in one of the innumerable living languages, and that you respond to it properly in one of them. I also found this belief from within language, whereupon every spoken language becomes the language of faith, in Rosenzweig's work and within it was the kernel of our later work together: the translation from one language of

speech to another...of that book, which is unique among all books in that it transmits the history of man as a kind of conversation.⁵⁸

Buber refers here to the Old Testament, its unique emphasis on time and its perception of history as dialogic—with the exception of the Psalms, the Hebrew Bible is structured as a dialogue between man and God. The things heard and those not heard are a part of this ongoing interaction. The Hebrew God is the God of time and the story of the Jewish people is, thus, the history of interaction. In their translation of the Old Testament into German, Rosenzweig and Buber attempted to maintain that specific quality of a spoken (rather than a written language). This reading of language is in accordance with the Jewish view of history and theory as revealed through conversation. The ability to listen and appropriately respond in each language is contingent to Buber with the ethical dimension of being present in time and the ethics of dialogue. This connection might become clearer after we look at another work written by Buber.

In the chapter “Languages” from the anthology *Meetings* Buber speaks of his childhood fascination with the multiplicity of languages and that ‘thing’ in language that resists translation. Describing the tension between different languages and the communicable and mysterious aspect of any language (“I am the dark side of the moon”⁵⁹ as he would later describe) Buber writes:

I followed time after time an individual word or even structure of words from one language to another, found it there again and yet had time after time to give up something lost that apparently only existed in a single one of all the languages. That was not merely “nuance of meaning”: I devised for myself two-language

⁵⁸ Buber, "Translation of the Bible. Its Intentions and Paths," 349.

⁵⁹ This sentence was written by Buber during his pantheist practice to highlight the aporias and limitation of language when describing mystical experience. In, Buber and Mendes-Flohr, *Ecstatic Confessions : The Heart of Mysticism*, xxxii.

conversations...and came ever again, ...to feel the tension between what was heard by the one and what was heard by the other, from his thinking in another language.⁶⁰

The movement between languages opens Buber to what Derrida calls ‘the otherness of language.’ And as Derrida expresses so eloquently, the rapport with the other is what allows that inherent alterity to be heard:

Deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls summons or motivate it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation—a response to a call. The other, as the other than self, the other that supposes self- identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. It is in this rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself.⁶¹

Derrida affirmed, on many occasions, that deconstruction is a suspension of reference that is deeply concerned with the otherness of language. While otherness already exists it is not a being and it cannot be understood through the tracing of a semiological connection back to a signified. On the contrary, otherness can be understood through openness to the impossibility of signification, and understanding of the differences and deference of language. The other, Derrida, emphasizes is perhaps not a referent in the normal sense of the word and therefore, I would add, it cannot be *seen*. It is through the suspension of reference and the play of intertextuality that the otherness that is always already there gets to be *heard*. Both Derrida and Buber use principals of Jewish rhetoric, which emphasizes differences and intertextuality as a key for the deep understanding of language, that is—reality.

⁶⁰ Buber, *Meetings*, 21.

⁶¹ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida*, 118.

In many of his writings Derrida focuses on the particulars, on the minute details that show the problem of logocentrism and the trace. Often, he would take a sentence or a word central to his demonstration of an idea and then wonder whether these can be translated to another language⁶². This led him to interrogating the special meaning of each word in its original language and the meaning that would arise out of the new context. The words can often be read in multiple ways and create new meanings with each new context, thus demonstrating the problem of the trace. Translation into another language makes the element of otherness that already exists more pronounced. However, it is this radical alterity that enables us to accept it for what it is. The following section is taken from his ruminations on *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*:

De L'esprit is a thoroughly French title, much too French to give the sense of the *gesitige* or *geistlich* of *Geist*. But that is the point: it will perhaps be heard better in German. Perhaps, at any rate, we will be more properly sensitive to its Germanness if we will let its resonance be heard coming from a foreign language, so as to put it to the test of translation, or rather if we put to the test of its resistance to translation. And if we submit our own language to the same test.⁶³

Zizek beautifully explains the notion of otherness and translation:

We really understand it only when we perceive how our effort to determine exhaustively its meaning fails not because of the lack of our understanding but because the meaning of this word is incomplete already “in itself” (in the Other language). Every language by definition, contains an aspect of openness to enigma, to what eludes its grasp, to the dimension where “words fail.” This minimal openness of the meaning of its words and propositions is what makes a language “alive.” We effectively understand” a foreign culture when we are able to identify with its points of failure: when we are able to discern not its hidden

⁶² A few examples are: Heidegger's *Geist* in: Derrida, *Of Spirit : Heidegger and the Question*. The expression “the time is out of joint” in: ———, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. the *Specters of Marx*, and the expression: “il y a d'un certain pas” in: Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying--Awaiting (One Another at) The "Limits of Truth" (Mourir--S'attendre Aux "Limites De La Vérité")* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁶³ Derrida, *Of Spirit : Heidegger and the Question*, 4.

positive meaning, but rather its blind spot, the deadlock the proliferation of meaning endeavors to cover up.

The more general lesson of this linguistic example, Zizek continues, is that in our efforts to understand another culture,

We should not focus on its specificity (on the peculiarity of “their customs,” etc.); we should rather endeavor to encircle that which eludes their grasp, the point at which the Other is in itself dislocated, not bound by its “specific context”...I understand the Other when I become aware of how the very problem that was bothering me (the nature of the Other’s secret) is already bothering the Other itself. The dimension of the Universal thus emerges when the two lacks-- mine and that of the Other- overlap.⁶⁴

Tolerance to each language’s enigma and imperfection enables openness to the undecided and what eludes grasp—what is always in motion and out of sight. It allows different enactments of language and being, and it is from this place that openness to the Other, as “Other,” can develop. Taking on Zizek’s last point, Eric Santner declares that one of the goals of his own book *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* is to show

that this shift of logics marks the point at which we truly enter *the midst of life*, that is, when we truly inhabit the proximity to our neighbor, assume responsibility for the claims his or her singular and uncanny presence makes on us not only in extreme circumstances but *every day*.⁶⁵

Santner’s neighbor echoes Derrida’s discussion on the foreigner’s rights⁶⁶. By linking Zizek’s point on linguistic aporia, Santner emphasizes the need to enter the midst of life and accept the singularity of each situation.

⁶⁵ Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life : Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 7.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18-22.

This point is similar to the one Buber is making. When Buber enters the midst of time, the silence between the minutes is infinite, and at this moment one is able to hear and ‘respond’ in every language. When Buber says ‘from within’ language, he is committed to what remains elusive in each spoken language. The particularities of words are contingent to the particularities of the other. We have seen - at the beginning of the chapter - that the focus on particulars, differences and contingency are central to Jewish thought. Here, Buber makes use of them to express his theory of meeting and its centrality in the process of awakening. It is attention to details and the differences within and between languages that help manifest that otherness of language and it is that which enables him to truly meet the Other. Elsewhere Buber emphasizes the importance a dialogue in spite of or *because of* apparent differences between people:

During the First World War it became clear to me that a process was progressively taking place, one which I had not noticed earlier except hypothetically; a process of increased difficulty in true dialogue between man and his fellow man; and there was an especially great difficulty in dialogue between people who are different from each other in nature and opinion. Face to face dialogue, without fences and barriers, becomes hard and rare, and the gaps between man and man widen with increasing cruelty, making the danger graver that it will no longer be possible to build a bridge between them. Then, thirty five years ago, my eyes were opened to see that here was the main issue in the destiny of mankind.⁶⁷

The gaps between people and the need to acknowledge them echo his meditation on the gaps in language. After all, Hebrew language is not understood simply as representative but as a generative force and an aspect of reality.

⁶⁷ as cited in, Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 88.

Consequently, the discursive move of presenting the dialogue between languages, and the commitment to gaps and aporias in language and time—allows Buber to present his ideas on the ethical dimension of ultimate respect for the other as a reflection of tolerance of the element of ambiguity inherent to each language. The appropriate response is not subject to an abstract or universal law, but is specific and concrete and arises out of the specific context and the ability to adapt to each and every language and world view.

Time

In his testimonies, Buber often refers to the element of time. In the chapter ‘A Conversion’, Buber differentiates between the previous mysticism he equates with desire to transcendence in time: “time could be torn apart...the ‘religious’ lifted you out. Over there now lay the accustomed existence with its affairs, but here illumination and ecstasy and rapture held without time or sequence.”⁶⁸ Buber contrasts his previous approach with his dialogic theory which insists on appropriate response in the present: "you are called upon from above, required, chosen, empowered, sent, you with this your mortal bit of life meant.”⁶⁹

We shall see in the next chapter that in Christianity time is equated with mortality, textuality, and sin. The mystic’s desire has therefore been to transcend them and enter the infinite silence and ineffability that were equated with divinity. After his transformation, Buber understands that the way in which he had read mysticism was equated with a need

⁶⁸ Buber, *Meetings*, 45.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

to transcend the word and time and be carried away from the mundane and the everyday. He is not interested in transcendence anymore, but in the particularity of each word and the sanctity of each moment: “You are not swallowed up in fullness without obligation, you are willed for the life of communion.”⁷⁰

In his book *Shabbath* Heschel discusses the importance of time in Judaism:

The Bible is more concerned with time than with space. It sees the world in the dimension of time. It pays more attention to generations, to events, than to countries, to things; it is more concerned with history than with geography. To understand the teaching of the Bible, one must accept its premise that time has a meaning for life which is at least equal to that of space; that time has a significance of its own.⁷¹

Heschel describes Judaism as *an architecture of time*. It sanctifies time and teaches its followers to find holiness in time. Boman builds on Dobschut’s assertion that Hebrew thinking moves in time while the Greeks’ dominant form is space.⁷² The Greco-European concept of time is determined by the solar cycle and is conceived as a straight line, a series in succession. Hebrew time, on the other hand, is based on the rhythmic cycles of the moon and is, therefore, understood as a ceaseless return of the same time content.⁷³ This is also reflected in the structure of the Hebrew language, which does not have multiple tenses (i.e., perfect, progressive, etc). While there is a separation between past, present and future these tenses are not further divided. However, since Hebrew has multiple groups of verbs, time is the content of the actions taken. Discussing actions in

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York,: Farrar, 1951), 6.

⁷² Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (Philadelphia,: Westminster Press, 1960), 133.

⁷³ Ibid., 135-36.

terms of their duration and placement on an axis of time is very confusing to the Hebrew mind, which understands time and actions differently.

Boman explains that in Greco-European thought space is the dominant form of thinking, which operates like a container of actions. For the Hebrews, time plays this role and consciousness is the container. In temporal consciousness events are not things, but abiding facts, and each event is understood as a coherent whole. Hebrew "Present" is, therefore, fluid - containing both Past and Future, simultaneously. The events are therefore understood not according to their temporal placement, but to their content, and any events keep reverberating from the past into the future. Similarly, the Biblical text was not considered to be in temporal order, and even the division into chapters and sentences was forced on it by Christian theology, in medieval times.

Buber's writings reflect a movement from a linear understanding of time, which needs to be transcended, to an understanding of time as fluid and determined by the content of the events: "The illegitimacy of such a division of the temporal life, which is streaming to death and eternity and which only in fulfilling its temporality can be fulfilled in face of these, was brought home to me by an everyday event, an event of judgment."⁷⁴ Each event now carries the reverberations of past and future events and cannot be isolated from the intertextual matrix of life: "This moment is not extracted from it, it rests on what has been and beckons the remainder that has still to be lived."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Buber, *Meetings*, 45.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

The different conceptions of time is emphasized also through the use of pantheistic versus Jewish expressions in the two parts of his chapter “A Conversion.” The first part of Buber’s life is characterized by the ways in which it was removed from earthly life: “Religious experience was an experience of otherness that did not fit into the context of life.”⁷⁶ Buber uses abstract concepts such as: “ecstatic,” “exceptional,” “mysterious,” “uncanny,” and “rapture” that “could lift you up” to solidify the impression of aloofness and the poetic longing associated with it. These images were taken from a familiar jargon associated with Christian mysticism but also with the ecstasy of drugs, hereby creating a homology between both experiences that is tainted with a critical and negative tone. In his contribution of his rebuttal to Huxley’s paeon to the marvelous intoxication of mescaline, Buber states that in that intoxication “one experiences to some degree what the mystic feel.” He calls the “vacation” from the personality induced by drugs, “situationless” and views the tendency to immerse oneself in the private sphere as anti-social.⁷⁷

When he later describes the dissolution of time which lead to dissolution of the world and subjectivity, Buber uses the word “nitzotz” (“sparks”), therefore alluding to the Kabbalistic theory of the breaking of vessels. By using the Kabbalistic theory on the mutual responsibility of man and God in the repairing and the creation of the world, Buber is already making a statement on the ideals of reciprocity and ethics. Moreover, the Kabbalist theory has a unique understanding of time in which each *sphira* is emanating

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 100.

from the previous one but without replacing it, creating a continuous reverberations and generation of things. Since the Kabbalist concepts used by Buber have multiple meanings and religious associations, Buber does not need to be explicit and can allow the readers to connect the associations of time and communication that are invoked by the terminology of an old tradition.

For Buber, time, language, and the ability to respond are contingent upon one another. It is important that Buber links the two dimensions of reality, and that he links them in a metonymical way, which avoids identities and allows both to exist. The mystical stage was characterized by removal from time and communication. However, his latter stage is characterized by the ability to listen, and respond in time and in language. Presence and appropriate response are embodied in time—in the continuous presence: “These experiences...brought me from a hidden sphere of time and language to the sphere of the hour, between one chime of the clock to another.” Time is no longer linear and can be experienced differently when it is fully met: “Everything is suspended and directed so you can hear what is said to you. Precisely at this very moment...”⁷⁸ This is related to Buber’s declaration “more than that I do not know.” The ability to face the present moment requires giving up on the certainty of the fleeting past and the unknown future: “The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens.”⁷⁹ The silence between the minutes echoes another gap—the one inherent to any language use and the spaces between people.

⁷⁸ Buber, "Translation of the Bible. Its Intentions and Paths," 349.

⁷⁹ ———, *Meetings*, 46.

Suspense between the chimes of the clock entails tolerance to the uncertainty of time. It parallels the previous term ‘in language’ -- tolerance of the aporia inherent to each language and the inability to translate from one language to another. However, it is precisely this presence and tolerance of this uncertainty that enables appropriate response.

Haunting

Buber’s transformation marks a different understanding of time that is no longer seen as moving on linear axis but as a cyclical present. The focus is on the qualitative content of the events, and requires greater commitment to the present moment and what each event unfolds. This understanding of temporality and consciousness, as the container of things, is in accord with the idea of haunting - in which past events are continuously present in the unconscious and keep reverberating over time. In the interview quoted below, Buber describes his transformation by answering the question “How have you lived so deeply in interpersonal relationships?” In his answer Buber describes the way in which he was haunted by past events and the need to fully meet them which had finally changed him.

...And then I, in 1918, I felt something rather strange. I felt that I had been strongly influenced by something that came to an end just then, meaning the First World War. In the course of the war, I did not feel very much about this influence. But at the end I felt, “Oh, I have been terribly influenced,” because I could not resist what went on, and I was compelled to, may I say, to live it. Things that went on just at this moment. You may call this *imagining the real*. Imagining what was going on. This imagining, for four years, influenced me terribly. Just when it was finished, it finished by a certain episode in May 1919 when a friend of mine, a great friend, a great man, was killed by the antirevolutionary soldiers in a very barbaric way, and now again once more—and this was the last time—I was compelled to imagine just this killing, but not in an optical way alone, but may I say so, just with my *body*. And this was the decisive moment, after which, after some days and nights in this state, I felt, “Oh,

something has been done to me.” And from then on, these meetings with people, particularly with young people were—became—in a somewhat different form. I had a decisive experience, experience of four years, many concrete experiences, and from now on, I had to give something more than just my inclination to exchange thoughts and feeling and so on, I had to give the fruit of an experience.⁸⁰

The fine line between the real and illusion and the existential fear that I am not real is expressed in the following witty tale:

To Rabbi Yisaskhar of Wolborz there came a dead man whom he had once known when he was alive and prominent in his community, and begged the rabbi's help, saying that his wife had died some time ago and now he needed money to arrange for his marriage with another. "Don't you know," the zaddik asked him, "that you are no longer among the living, that you are in the world of confusion?" When the man refused to believe him, he lifted the tails of the dead man's coat and showed him that he was dressed in his shroud. Later Rabbi Isaskhar's son asked: "Well, if that is so-- perhaps I too am in the world of confusion?" "Once you know that there is such a thing as that world," answered his father, "you are not in it."⁸¹

The discursive move of ‘experiencing the real ...with the body’ reflects the idea that change must begin with awareness. Buber does not describe the pain or actual change at length. He focuses on the historical background, alludes to possible implications and focus on the event of truly meeting what was otherwise imagined. The imagination expresses the reverberations of events and the ways in which the consciousness is haunted by past events. It is also related to the Jewish thinking in terms of conditions rather than identity: ‘*as if*’ rather than ‘*I am*,’ Everything could have been otherwise and all the possibilities simultaneously exist as textual as well as psychological possibilities. By imagining with the body, Buber uses a dialectics of presence and absence that allows

⁸⁰ Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 88-89.

⁸¹ Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*.

him to truly meet what perhaps happened and consequently transform. The realization is therefore not merely intellectual, hence the need to share its fruits.

Rhetoric of Compulsion and Choice

I have already mentioned that Buber was concerned with the duality of determinism versus choice. This duality played a part in the construction of his conversion story and was echoed in the tension between the Holy Yehudi and the Seer of Lublin in the book *For the Sake of Heaven*. In both stories the religious aspirations and mysticism are associated with a deterministic way of life that clashes with the demands of the everyday. This duality concerned Buber greatly and he returned to it in numerous books and articles. The scholarly paper "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and Historical Hour" contains a concentrated and comprehensive expression of it:

Do I dare the definitely impossible or do I adapt myself to the unavoidable? Do I dare to become other than I am, trusting that in reality I am indeed other can so put it to the test, or do I take cognizance of a barrier in my present existence a something that will eternally be a barrier? Transposing the question from biography to history: does the historical hour ever experience its real limits otherwise than through undertaking to overstep those limits it is familiar with? Does the future establish itself ever anew, or is it inescapably destined?⁸²

The questions formulated here are brought to a climatic tension and the resolution in Buber's own awakening as it is told in the chapter "A Conversion."

The rhetoric of compulsion and determinism is expressed in the particular circumstances of the meeting with the young man: "I learned that he had come to me not

⁸² Martin Buber, "Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour," in *On the Bible*, ed. N.N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 173. As cited in, Shapira, *Hope for Our Time : Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, 99.

casually, but borne with destiny, not for a chat but for a decision.”⁸³ The tension between determinism and choice is resolved in the notion of the call: “you are called upon from above, required, chosen, empowered, sent, you with your mortal bit of life are meant.”⁸⁴ While the meeting is predetermined, one still has the freedom whether or not to respond to the call of the other: “You are not swallowed up in fullness without obligation, you are willed for the life of communion.”⁸⁵ Although willed, communion is, nevertheless, also a moral and human obligation. The discursive move of the call frames Buber’s change and emphasis on response, as both a religious obligation as well as a way of life that is grounded in choice.

Silence

Silence fulfills a couple of different goals in Buber’s description of his awakening. The first is performative—by avoiding descriptions and merely alluding to them, Buber uses dialectics of presence and absence and invites the readers to fill in the missing information. The second use of silence is descriptive on two levels—it describes the situation at hand; as well as the process of understanding. I begin this section by contextualizing silence within the larger framework of Judaism and then discuss silence in Buber’s works in light of that.

Nahar points to the paradox between Biblical glorification of the word and the relative neglect of silence. However, King David revolutionary claimed “To you glorious stillness” (“lecha dumiya tehila”) and we can also find in the Psalms the famous sentence:

⁸³ Buber, *Meetings*, 46.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

“To the end that my heart may sing praise to you, and not be silent” (Psalms, 30:12). The importance of both stillness and speech is expressed in the Psalms, song 150-- the wonderful orchestra ends with the more silent praise of the soul [*neshama*-- translated here as 'everything that has breath']: ” Ultimately, nothing is heard.”⁸⁶ Andre Nahar shows that silence in the Old Testament is a tool for God’s revelation to man in another way as well. In the constant dialogue between man and God, silence is not just a meaningless break, but it is just as important and insightful as the speech itself. In the duality between silence and speech, silence is necessary and complementary to speech.⁸⁷

The dialectics between presence and absence, silence and speech is expressed in the following interpretation of Isaiah:

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak said: “It is written in Isaiah: ‘ For instruction shall go forth from me.’ How shall we interpret this? For we believe with perfect faith that the Torah, which Moses received on Mount Sinai cannot be changed, and that none other will be given, it is unalterable and we are forbidden to question even one of its letters. But, in reality, not only the black letters but the white gaps in between are symbols of the teaching, only that we are not able to read those gaps. In time to come God will reveal the white hiddenness of the Torah.”⁸⁸

I have already discussed the understanding of the Torah as whole and pregnant with multiple meanings. The letters, their shape, the punctuation and even the way silence is structured are essential to the understanding of the text. In this tale as well, God is revealed not only in the explicit but also in the gaps, as the spaces between the letters symbolize the unknown and silence of the Torah. The blank spaces are the place of ambiguity, and it is from that silent place that further interpretation and multiplicity can

⁸⁶ Andre Nahar, "To You Glorious Silence," *Ptachim* A, B, no. January (1985).

⁸⁷ ———, "Silence and Secrecy of Face in the Prophecy," in *The Fifth Universal Congress to the Science of Judaism* (1969).

⁸⁸ Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 232.

arise. What is not said is as important as what is pronounced, in Derrida's words: 'the thing itself always escapes.'⁸⁹

In the chapter "A Conversion," Buber avoids a direct description of his actual change. But similarly to the Hassidic tale or the conversation between man and God, both what is said and what is not said contribute to the impression the chapter makes on the readers. In the first section of the chapter, Buber describes his conception of the 'religious' in his early life; in the middle, Buber describes his meeting with the young man who came to meet him; the third and last part of the chapter embodies Buber's theory of dialogue. Shapira claims that the silence between the two sections of the chapter parallels the silence between the chimes of the clock, as Buber once referred to it. Here, also, it is what is not pronounced—that is more important. Buber does not explicate the details of his conversion; rather he *shows* the consequences of his change through his commitment to being in time and with the other. When reflecting on his meeting with the young man, Buber is making the point that previously he did not listen to the white spaces between the black letters. Buber's new ethics would be to make silence as pregnant with presence and intention as sound.

The revelation of God, as well as the birth of Buber's new subjectivity, is described as a movement from the articulated to the unarticulated and back to conceptual knowledge. In the chapter 'Question and Answer,' Buber accompanies Hechler to the railway station where he is asked whether he believes in God. Buber reflects on that question: "After the talk with Hechler: I remained standing for a long time on the corner

⁸⁹ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 165.

of the black path and gave myself up to the clarity, now beyond speech, that had begun.”⁹⁰ Buber describes the process of conceptual knowledge arises in him: “suddenly in spirit, there where speech again and again forms itself, there arose without having been formulated by me, word for word distinct.”⁹¹ Interesting for the purposes of this dissertation is the question, if Buber’s description is so clear, why does he refer to it as ‘beyond words’? One possible answer would be that inexpressibility was mentioned for descriptive reasons. The designation of ineffability is descriptive and enables to distinguish the new insight from other mundane understandings. The silent awareness is in contrast with the prior confusion, thus further extenuating its significance.

Inexpressible understanding can also be a literal description of an embodied experience. According to Michael Polanyi, when knowledge is formed from subsidiary awareness and embodied activity it belongs to the tacit dimension. Tacit knowledge is clearly felt since it is more embodied, intuitive and holistic in nature, but it is difficult to translate into conceptual knowledge which belongs to the explicit dimension.⁹² As was explained in the second chapter, tacit experience precedes words but not transcends them. Thus, Buber’s prolonged silence can be read as the movement from tacit to conceptual realization, Also according to Welwood, the process of awakening or transformation begins with attention to a global feeling of the situation, progresses into a direct inquiry of the disturbing wound and culminates with a process of articulation that unveils the

⁹⁰ Buber, *Meetings*, 44.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² A longer summary is provided in Chapter One of this work. Also see: Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge : Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, Corrected ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

smoke out of which the sensations arose.⁹³ The intuitive, embodied understanding is translated into words and then, once again, is processed - finally becoming more holistic and meaningful.

Silence also creates space that allows for true intimacy to arise. In some Hassidic tales the tzadic and disciples sit together without speaking. In a verbose culture like Judaism, it is interesting that silence indicates closeness. In one tale, the ability to connect through silence and physical contact is related to awakening:

Rabbi Aaron once came to the city where little Mordecai, who later became the rabbi of Lechovitz, was growing up. His father brought the boy to the visiting rabbi and complained that he did not persevere in his studies. "Leave the boy with me for a while," said rabbi Aaron. When he was alone with little Mordecai, he lay down and took the child to his heart. Silently he held him to his heart until his father returned. "I have given him a good talking-to," he said. "From now on, he will not be lacking in perseverance." Whenever the rabbi of Lechovitz related this incident, he added: "That was when I learned how to convert men."⁹⁴

Similarly for Buber, the silent reflection and embodied realization might indicate a relational connection to the question he was asked. It is truly meeting the ambiguity of the question-- that allows the appropriate response to arise. Silence, here, is not only descriptive, but is also an expression of Buber's dialogical theory.

In sum, Buber creates gaps and silences, as well as alluding to the ineffability of a moment in a strategic way. Although his previous interest in the ineffability of mysticism has given place to his dialogical understanding, he makes use of it in his descriptions of awakening, nevertheless. The use of silence serves a few purposes: it describes a process

⁹³ John Welwood, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening : Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation*, 1st ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 2000).

⁹⁴ Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, 200.

of tacit realization and the movement from conceptual to tacit and back to conceptual realization in the process of understanding. The use of ineffability and the construction of silence also allow Buber to differentiate between different levels of understanding and presents that particular moment as more special and ‘real.’ Finally, the silent pondering is also performative since it showcases even the silent reflection as a relational process in which one truly meets the question at hand. However, silence is not ontological here and it is used just like words to convey his experience and beliefs.

Chapter Summary

Buber’s interest in various traditions is reflected in his writings, but his transformation marks a return to a more Jewish worldview and rhetoric. To begin with, Buber hardly mentions that his experience was ineffable. Only once does he describe a tacit understanding that, according to him, cannot be conveyed in words, but throughout his testimonies Buber expresses the opposite movement: from desire for transcendence and ineffability to focus on textuality and openness to the otherness of language. Similarly, he expresses a reverse movement from transcendence in time to focus on the present moment, which also contains the reverberations of past and haunting events. From solitary mysticism, he focuses on meeting with the other. Accordingly, his claim for ineffability and use of silence is not ontological nor is it constructed as transcendental and beyond textuality, but as just another aspect of the textual and dialogic process.

Buber’s dialogical theory is not merely described but is constructed in various ways that are in accord with Jewish hermeneutics—the understanding of reality as

divinely verbal and of God as revealed through words. The use of Hassidic tales, and the Jewish metaphors of eroticism and bridges further help him construct the significance of dialogue. Most importantly, Buber's insights are presented as the result of important interactions and the willingness to transform and be transformed by the Other. The Buberian understanding of meeting is not limited to people, but it encompasses every aspect of life - including the ability to meet one's own pain, and even the unknown. True meeting is therefore not limited to meeting between those that are similar. On the contrary, true meeting is contingent upon the acceptance of differences and ambiguity. Meeting has an ethical significance as one is called to appropriately respond in each and every particular context.

Rather than devising natural rules for proper action, Buber emphasizes the importance of details. He ponders the meaning of each word and the ways in which they refuse translation; he ruminates upon each question presented to him, and attempts to meet each and every person. Buber makes no use of abstract notions, such as mystery, love, or structure. His descriptions are rather grounded in events and people. The importance of particulars becomes more pronounced, due to his new understanding of time that is no longer conceived as a movement on a linear axis from conception to death. Time is understood as the framework of life, but is understood mainly by the qualitative content of events. Consequently, this supports the focus on time and the importance of contextual response in each situation. For Buber, "to be awake" means a responsible response and the becoming in time. The emphasis on particulars is in accord both with

rabbinic hermeneutics as well as with the Hassidic emphasis on equanimity and kavana, in each and every action.

However, far from conveying the isolated nature of each meeting, Buber weaves his ideas together through allusions to familiar concepts from the Jewish canon, Hassidic tales and important events from his past. Rather than the establishing of identities, Buber emphasizes the contingencies of situations and ideas and the connection between events. The past meetings, or the possibilities of meetings, are constructed as somewhat haunting, as they keep reverberating in his mind. It is only through fully meeting these events that Buber is able to transform. The weaving of ideas, and events from different traditions and times recalls the intertextual style of rabbinic exegesis and the nonlinear writing of the Old Testament. The reverberations of other familiar themes in each narrative further establish the inherent connection between all things and the centrality of dialogue and listening. By creating a dialogue between two languages and enjoying that which cannot be translated, Buber expresses openness to differences and the otherness of language. It is precisely the hidden sphere of language and time that allows new and multiple meanings to arise. Similarly, a dialogue between people should not shy away from differences or deflate them into similarities. Similarly in language—only in attending to the present moment, one can truly listen and appropriately respond. It is through the willingness to fully accept the gaps of time and language that the inherent otherness is understood and the fullness of life can be truly met.

Buber uses silence, but this does not assume an ontological meaning or poetic longing in his writings. The silence between the sections of his descriptions recalls the

silence between the chimes of the clock or the gaps between words. Silence is strategically constructed in particular places to allow a message or a tacit experience to be processed before new words resume and a somewhat different personality emerges. The silence is not constructed as beyond words or more important than them, but just as important as the words. The ways in which silence is used makes it just a part of the whole message that is constructed through the play of text and silence and gaps. While the differences and breaks are important they are, nevertheless, used as an integral part of the whole.

The use of silence is in accord with the more performative rhetoric in many of the testimonies. In a few instances Buber does not describe a particular experience, but moves on to *show* the change. In other words, his descriptions focus on his actions, on the way in which he chose to live his life. Also, the element of embodiment in the attempt to relive his past, and the emphasis on equanimity and actions of the Hassidic tales, are in accord with that form of writing.

Buber's awakening is described by him as spurred by a trauma and a sense of guilt that sought resolution. Although historical evidence points to the fact that his actual awakening progressed through a few years, Buber chose to construct it as a dramatic event that is instigated by a meeting. This, as was previously claimed, served his dialogic theory. This model of conversion is also in accord with the Christian narrative of a change that is instigated by a trauma and the replacement of an old life with a new understanding.

Also, the concept of meeting, albeit influenced by Jewish thinking, is not limited to it. His theory of meeting, contextual response and the importance of all actions based on the kavana with which they are performed, can be read also in the context of Zen. Buber, himself, was aware of that fact and emphasized in his writings the similar aspects of Hassidism and Zen. According to Hassidic theory, in high conversion one goes through deep psychological transformation and understands that everything happens according to God's will—which is, in fact, pulsing in one's heart. The duality between mundane and sacred, or right and wrong is now no longer relevant, since everything is equally as good as the bad that the good encompasses, and all is leading to where it supposed to be. The tension between these dualities is not completely resolved in Buber, for he maintains a new duality of I-Thou, instead. This can be in line with the Christian focus on mediation and the figurative understanding of God as a way to resolve the tension between dualities. It is perhaps not accidental that Buber is one of the only Jewish writers on religion who is popular with followers of different traditions.

CHAPTER 4: THE TRANSCENDENCE OF WOR(L)DS- AWAKENING AND INEFFABILITY IN CHRISTIANITY

This chapter presents us not only with different understandings of awakening and different methods of overcoming the limits of language than the ones we have observed in the previous chapter, but with more basic differences in the very construction of ‘ineffability.’ At the root of these changes are variations in understandings of divinity, textuality and the nature of language and words. The different conceptions of language in the Judaic and Christian traditions are reflected already when observing their different understandings of the basic linguistic structure: ‘word.’ According to some writers, the definition of ‘word’ has shaped Greek philosophy and consequently the Christian worldview that was very much influenced by it. While the Hebrew word ‘*davar*,’ was not only a word, but also a thing; the Greek term *onoma*, is synonymous with name. Gadamer explains that the original unity of word and thing, discourse and thought were in that way disrupted, determining the entire history of Western thought of language.¹ One of the most important consequences of this cleavage, claims Handelman, was a suspicion towards language and a movement toward silent ontology and transcendence, or a purely rational sign system as in mathematics.²

Handelman explains that the central doctrine of the Christian church: awakening or incarnation—signified the attempt to resolve this tension by merging the dualities—the

¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

² Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

word made flesh. While the Hebrew God spoke and created texts, and while a religious practice for the rabbis was the endless process of interpretation, the Christian God was silently suffering. This chapter builds on the above claim and shows the development of Christian rhetoric that puts at its center the duality of spirit and language, silence and words, suffering and love, and the attempt to bring them into unity through the very process of awakening in the image of the incarnated God.

In this chapter I unpack the above statement and explore the rhetoric of ineffability through analysis of important cases of awakening beginning with that of St. Paul and St. Augustine, moving on to the more current cases of Charles G Finney and Robert Merton. We will see that Christian rhetoric can be characterized by the use of displacement, allegory, spatial imagery, dualities and an attempt to resolve them by focus on universals through the very notions of awakening and silence, transfiguration, and the idiom of 'love.' I begin this chapter by discussing the centrality of awakening in Christianity.

Awakening

As a missionary religion, conversion of individuals and groups has always been at the heart of the Christian Church. The word conversion is derived from the Latin *convertere* which means to 'to revolve,' 'turn around' or 'head in a different direction.'³ In some contexts, 'conversion' means a spiritual process of turning one's life to God in Jesus Christ, and in other contexts it refers to a formal confession of the Christian faith

³ K. Frank Flinn, "Conversion: Up from Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience," in *Religious Conversions: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, ed. Christopher; and Bryant Lamb, Darrol, M. (London and new York: Cassell, 1999), 66.

and doctrines of the Christian Church. For Lutherans, Catholics and Calvinists, conversion could even be accomplished by force, if necessary. Famously, colonialism and the devastation of indigenous groups during the sixteenth and seventeenth century had led to their conversion into Christianity. The eighteenth and nineteenth century also saw masses in Africa and Asia converting into Christianity. Christian conversion through wars and rhetoric has thus profoundly shaped Western culture and most if not the entire world.

The reformation added a new context for conversion in Christianity. From that moment on, ‘conversion’ referred not only to a change of faith from one religion into Christianity, but to conversion into a different stream of Christian thought. Luther, himself, had experienced a meaningful conversion which he referred to as a ‘tower experience’—from his Catholic faith to ‘Pauline’ Christianity that is centered on justification by faith. With the splintering of Western Christianity into hundreds of groups and denominations, conversion has aimed at Christianity itself. Conversion had become polemic,⁴ as new Protestant churches sought to convert Catholics, and Catholicism sought to restore its previous order and glory through conversion of others. An increased emphasis on the importance of conversion, as an important and integral experience in Christian life, had been added and rhetoric of conversion had gained in prominence. The Methodist way emphasized conversion as crucial to what Wesley called ‘Christian perfection.’ In Puritan Christianity emerged a new view of Christianity that

⁴ Darrol Bryant, M, "Conversion in Christianity: From without and from Within," in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, ed. Christopher; and Bryant Lamb, Darrol, M. (London and New York: Cassell, 1999).

centered on ‘new birth’ as the mark of the Christians. Pentecostals emphasized the importance of ‘conversion’ experience or ‘baptism in the spirit’ that is often associated with various gifts and miracles such as healing and speaking in tongues.⁵ Thanks to this powerful rhetoric, the Pentecostals who used to be a marginal US Christian movement have rapidly expanded to Latin America and Africa and the movement is now the fastest growing religious movement in these areas.⁶ Movements of mass conversions - known as the ‘Great Awakening, ‘Second Awakening’ and so on – occurred at different times in the United States, shaping its religious faith and culture.

The missionary nature of Christianity and its focus on awakening can be linked to the strong foundation set by the model of Jesus. The transformative and existential nature of mystical conversions in Christianity is based on the dominant belief in the historical Jesus Christ who was born of a Virgin of God, suffered the torments of Good Friday, died only to be resurrected in the body on Easter Sunday, and transcended to Heaven to co-rule with the other persons in the trinity.⁷ Belief in the historical events in the life of Jesus enabled the transformation of these events into the powerful mystical symbols of transfiguration through suffering and resurrection, later on.

According to Katz, awakening experiences and rhetoric are modeled in Christianity after Jesus in two ways: Suffering in Christ and the Love of Christ. The first

⁵ Ibid.

⁶See for example, Karl-Wilhelm Westmeier, *Protestant Pentecostalism in Latin America : A Study in the Dynamics of Missions* (Madison, N.J. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1999).

⁷ Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience.", Westmeier, *Protestant Pentecostalism in Latin America : A Study in the Dynamics of Missions*.

pattern is that of the suffering Christ, which leads to extreme forms of Christian mystical asceticism and mortification. John of the Cross, for example, takes crucifixion to be the model for humanity. The destruction and crucifixion teach the ways in which the soul is liberated through the refusal of worldly and sensual pleasures. Participating in the passion of the Christ thus becomes a coveted way to achieve transformation and transcendence. It paves the way for the ultimate mystical longing—the encounter with Christ, the lover.

The Second of these is the image of Christ as a lover, as predicated in the Song of Songs, and reworked in the New Testament.⁸ Christian exegesis sees the Song as an allegory of Christ's love for the Church, and while Christian mystics accept this interpretation they favor a more personal imagery in which Jesus is the male lover and the individual soul is the female lover. Consequently, many visions of mystics were infused with an encounter with Jesus, the lover and husband. I cite a famous example from Teresa of Avila's *Autobiography*, provided by Katz:

He [Jesus] bade me to suppose that he had forgotten me; He would never abandon me, but it was necessary I should do all that I could myself.

Our Lord said all this with great tenderness and sweetness; He also spoke other most gracious words, which I need not repeat. His majesty, further showing His great love for me, said to me very often: 'Thou art mine, and I am mine, and I am thine.' 'I am in the habit of saying myself, and I believe in all sincerity: 'What do I care for myself? O only care for thee, O my Lord.'⁹

The image of Jesus as a tender lover is echoed in many other testimonies. Other reports of Christian mystics, especially women, go as far as to visualize Jesus as the husband who wears a ring on the mystic's fingers. The rhetoric of love through Christ the lover

⁸ Bernard McGinn, "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University press, 1992).

⁹ Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," 11.

shapes the mystic's mind and helps them transform to his/her divine nature. Katz emphasizes that the mystics did not have a neutral experience that they interpret in the language of a transcendental zivug (in Judaism) or a personal encounter with Jesus. Rather, the respective rhetorical traditions have shaped the mystics to experience a specific kind of experience. For this reason, Christians experience transformation through suffering and the image of Christ the lover while Jews experience God the Father.

Another important element in the emulation of Jesus' awakening is transfiguration. The famous scene on Mount Thabor is analyzed by Richard Kearney in his *The God Who May Be*, as the place in which "the person of Jesus is transformed in front of his disciples into the *persona* of Christ."¹⁰ It is the material change in the flesh-and-blood figure, rather than an abandoning of this form—that according to Kearney has enabled his *persona* to shine forth. Kearney quotes the *Dictionnaire de la Bible*: "The transfiguration of Our Lord, which ancient tradition locates on Mount Thabor, is indicated by the verb *metamorphothe, transfiguratus est*, which supposes a change, not in the person itself, but in the *figure* in which it normally appears."¹¹ According to Saint Luke's Gospel, as Jesus was praying his face became sparkling white.¹² According to the narrative, his three disciples remained silent when witnessing this transformation and did not share with anyone what they had seen. They were startled by the whiteness of Jesus' face until they were reassured by God's voice who spoke to them from the cloud: "This is

¹⁰ Kearney, *The God Who May Be : A Hermeneutics of Religion*, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Luke 9:29-30

my son, the Chosen One.”¹³ Kearney reads the story on Mount Tabor as a call for transformation and fulfillment of the potential of persona embedded in each one of us, as something that happens through that very woundness and openness to the other; thereby reading “woundness” as a key for alteration. Other famous awakening stories in Christianity emulate this physical transfiguration and it is important that those ‘awakened’ experienced their transfiguration as a response to a divine call.

Saint John Damascene comments on the element of transfiguration by taking note of the common metaphor of the color white as a symbol of infinity: “Just as the sun’s light is other, so the visage of Christ shines forth like the divine light.”¹⁴ Kearney summarizes the elements of ineffability present in the above description of Jesus transfiguration: “It is beyond *perception* (the dazzling whiteness and the cloud), beyond *imagination* (the refusal of Peter’s cultic imaginings), and beyond *signification* (the observing of silence).”¹⁵ As we will see in more depth later in the chapter, the element of ineffability would often accompany that of transfiguration. The problem of Divinity as both beyond signification and as embodied in the image of Jesus would be the most central doctrine of the Christian Church.

The centrality of radical transformation as a response to a personal call is extenuated by the movement from suffering to love through the mediation of Jesus. This is notable in the writings of many Christian mystics such as John of the Cross, Theresa de Avila, Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart and his disciples, and perhaps all of the

¹³ Luke 9:35

¹⁴ Kearney, *The God Who May Be : A Hermeneutics of Religion*, 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

medieval Catholic mystics.¹⁶ It is therefore not surprising that awakening is often referred to in Christianity in terms of death and resurrection: ‘the dark night of the soul,’ ‘suffering with Christ,’ ‘dying with Christ,’ ‘rising with Christ,’ and ‘born again.’ In some sectors of Christianity,¹⁷ especially in the US, dramatic transformation and adjectives such as ‘new birth’ or ‘born again with Christ’ are the distinctive marks of being a true Christian.¹⁸

St. Paul

The beginning of Christianity and the centrality of awakening are primarily linked to Jesus. However, the conversion and teachings of Saul of Tarsus, more familiarly known as the Apostle Paul, the first missionary to the gentiles, has been most significant in shaping Christian thought and rhetoric. Paul’s radical transformation (from a persecutor of the church to an ardent follower), had Christians believe that nothing else but an outside origin, the risen Christ himself, could have caused it. Paul’s awakening has therefore provided validity to the faith in Jesus Christ and the Christian Church. For countless people, Paul’s story has provided the model of what a Christian conversion should be like.¹⁹ Perhaps most significantly, it was Paul’s rhetoric culminating in his focus on Jesus resurrection and Paul’s subsequent transfiguration that had led to the

¹⁶ Cited in: Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," 40.

¹⁷ Especially the Pentecostals that emerged in the US and have become very dominant in Latin America and Africa.

¹⁸ Bryant, "Conversion in Christianity: From without and from Within."

¹⁹ Richard Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament : Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999).

establishment of the gentile Church. In Paul, ‘awakening’ becomes a persuasive tool detrimental to the development of the Church.

The more dramatic version of Paul’s conversion, which emphasizes the element of before and after in Paul’s lives as well as the miraculous encounter with Jesus, does not appear in Paul’s own writings, but rather in *Acts*, which was written by Luke. Contemporary scholarship attributes the ecstatic account provided in *Acts* to the growing hostility between the Jewish community and the early Christian community. According to *Acts*, Saul was not an original disciple of Jesus but a devout Jew who resented and persecuted the Christian community. He is said to have witnessed the stoning of Stephen and of dragging men and women out of their houses and committing them to prison. On his way to Damascus, looking for those who belonged ‘to the way’ a light suddenly flashed on him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice crying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” The voice identified himself as Jesus and commanded Saul to return to the city where he would be told what to do. Paul loses his eye sight for three days at the end of which he is converted and baptized. Paul’s own accounts do not contain the miraculous accounts found in *Acts* nor the hostility to the Jewish population. However, it is Luke’s version that looms large in the Christian tradition and provides the elements of conversion: a divine call, radical transformation due to divine intervention, and transfiguration modeled after that of Christ – in this case – Paul’s blindness and the miracle of gaining his eye sight.

The Spirit, the Word, and the mediation of Christ

In his famous book on Saint Paul, the French philosopher Alain Badiou claims that Paul's teachings can be summarized by a single statement: 'Jesus is resurrected.'²⁰ Resurrection was the message bridging the two opposing traditions Paul faced when he began preaching: the Greeks who saw the apex of divinity in a wordless vision of a divine being, and the Jews who understood divinity as a deeper immersion and interpretation of the Scriptures. "For the Jews" writes Paul, "demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we teach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles."²¹ The message that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah meant nothing to the Greeks but was a heresy to the Jews. In order to persuade the two different cultures Paul had to adopt a rhetorical figure that would be understood and accepted by both traditions:

To the Jews I became a Jew in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law...I have become all things to all men...²²

Paul's Jesus, writes Handelman, "is a mediator of irreconcilable oppositions: between Jews and Gentiles, righteousness and sin, God and the world, soul and flesh, faith and works, the spirit and the letter, life and death."²³ Instead of textual mediation, Paul introduces a personal mediation through the figure of Jesus.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul : The Foundation of Universalism*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4.

²¹ 1 Cor. 1:22-23.

²² 1. Cor, 9: 20-22

²³ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 84.

Handelman explains that Paul's new rhetoric had to teach both traditions of the importance of Jesus as well as to address accusations made at the time, against Christianity and against Judaism. The Romans considered the Hebrew Scriptures barbarous and crude, while Christians were accused of being disloyal, and of practicing cannibalism, incest, and so forth.²⁴ To present Christianity as relevant to both Romans and Jews Paul had to reconstruct Christianity and cast the Old Scriptures in a new light. He had to read the scriptures in a new manner and use so to speak, a double language. The most suitable rhetorical forms for achieving this task were according to Handelman, allegory and typology. In the classical rhetoric with which Paul was familiar, allegory meant saying one thing to mean something else. This method of interpreting one system of signs in terms of another was used by the Romans and goes back to the Greeks. It was taken by Paul and, through the influence of Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, it was then passed on to Origen and Clement and was perfected by Augustine. That type of allegory has become a central method of interpretation and writing for the Church and has shaped our current understanding of literal and figurative.²⁵

Through the use of allegory and typology Paul and the Church fathers tried to show that behind the offensive and crude texts of the Jews were hidden philosophical truths appealing to the Greeks. The new reading that was now seen as inspired by the Spirit had replaced the previous and 'erroneous' reading of the Old Testament. The Jewish claims about the Messiah could not have been literally proven, but were now

²⁴ James Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity* (Harlow,: Longmans, 1968).

²⁵ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 84-85.

spiritually shown to be speaking about Jesus. Combining his extensive knowledge in both Jewish and Latin rhetoric, Paul then radicalized the Greek opposition between the spirit and the letter and applied it to the Old Testament in a new way.²⁶ In Paul's words:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ²For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.²⁷

The real teachings is now understood not as a process of interpretations of the texts but quite the contrary—as a speechless demonstration.

The distinction between substance and shadows is reminiscent of the Greek heritage and the Socratic turn—the movement between an ideal and its inferior representation. Allegory enabled Paul to distinguish between text and spirit, making the literal meaning mere mimesis of the more superior and spiritual reading. The use of typology also serves to nullify the Old Testament, which becomes in Paul's reading merely figures, types and shadows of the new revealed reality. The written text is now considered a shadow of the real substance that is Jesus. “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them.”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 1. Cor. 1-4

²⁸ 1. Cor. 14-15

The Jews, according to Paul, did not accept Jesus simply because they were not able to understand the ‘real’ and spiritual meaning of the words.

The perception according to which the texts have a real meaning that must be uncovered is rooted in a format of reading, which according to Harry Wolfson, imitates a specific form of Rabbinic exegesis. Wolfson reads the New Testament as containing four kinds of nonliteral interpretations of the Old Testament: (1) interpretive predictions of the first coming of Jesus; (2) interpretive predictions of his second coming; (3) proofs of his preexistence; and (4) non-literal interpretations of his legal and moral matters.²⁹ The first type of reading follows what Wolfson identifies as a ‘predictive midrash’—in this reading, the Scriptures are read as hinting the occurrence of future events. Paul had used this form of Rabbinic exegesis to establish an entirely new reading in which the text allegorically predicted Jesus. Handelman quotes Louis Ginsberg: “He learned the art of destroying the law by the law...from his Jewish masters...Israel’s history and legal enactment were construed (by Paul) as being in reality imitations of the realities of the faith, concealing the spirit in the letter and reducing the Old Testament to mere shadows.”³⁰ Future conversions would be similarly centered on the core element of their private death and resurrection (i.e., their conversion) with preliminary signs that predict the anticipated and inevitable event.

²⁹Harry Wolfson, "Greek Philosophy in Philo and the Church Fathers," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twerski (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), 74. In: Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 87.

³⁰ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 87.

The main Jewish rhetorical form is characterized by Handelman as metonymy—“as retaining differences within identity, stressing relationships of contiguity rather than substitution, preferring multivocal as opposed to univocal meaning. The play of *as if* over the assertions of *is*, juxtapositions over equivalencies, concrete images over abstractions.”³¹ In Hebrew, as we have seen, there is no distinction between a word and a thing and truth is a process of continuous interpretations. The fluid view of language, identities and differences was replaced in Paul with focus on the “pure unmediated presence of Jesus, who resolves all oppositions, stabilizes all meaning, provides ultimate identity, and collapses differentiation.”³² This is reflected in Paul’s famous statement upon his awakening: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”³³

Paul and the Church Fathers who followed him, has reverted to the representative model of language, which entailed the schism between substance and mimesis, spirit and text, suffering and love. The absence of the referent in language was not a problem for the Jews, but was unbearable in the new doctrine that attempted to attain the ultimate identity and presence through the mediation of Jesus. The risen Christ has become the ultimate referent, beyond the order of signification all together. In an essay of Augustine’s theory of language, to which I will return later, Margaret Ferguson discusses these aspects of Christian rhetoric and relates it to Derrida’s critique of metaphysical and ontological view of language. According to Ferguson, in a language based on a mimetic

³¹ Ibid., 88.

³² Ibid., 89.

³³ Gal. 3:28

model there is an external standard of correctness against which a language is “measured.” In Chapter Two we have traced this mimetic approach to the Socratic Turn and have seen the way it created expectations for direct representations of identities in language use. For Derrida, Ferguson reminds us, the very problem of language stems from the distinction between figurative and proper meaning and the assumption of a source of signification that exists somewhere outside the text.³⁴ The assumption that some things are beyond words, stems from the distinction between words and things; hence, the term ‘ineffability’ that does not even exist in Hebrew.

Here we can see the deep connection between awakening and ineffability in Christianity. In his awakening, Jesus breaks the order of signification and becomes the fulfiller of signs and the mediator of differences. Claims for ineffability, especially in the context of awakening, were based on this very dichotomy: Paul claims: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him— but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”³⁵ The strong light that blinds Paul and silences his companion in a manner recalling the silence of Jesus disciples further establish that awakening and Jesus himself are beyond signification. Through the act of awakening, Jesus becomes Christ (Messiah) and is considered the textless and ineffable origin.

The act of awakening divides life into before and after and creates dichotomy between text and spirit. Since Jesus is both human and divine, ‘the Word made flesh,’ it

³⁴ Margaret Ferguson, “Saint Augustine’s Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language,” *Georgia Review* 29 (1975).

³⁵ 1. Cor. 9-10

is through the mediation of Jesus that awakening resolves the same dualities. While the figure of Jesus has perhaps haunted Christianity, Paul's rhetoric does not maintain the aesthetics of haunting, of presence in absence. Rather, Jesus is the pure presence that collapses differences, ends suffering and brings all into universal unity.

Similarly, the rhetorical form manifesting in the stories is that of replacement and imitation. The New Testament does not add another layer of interpretation to what has now become the 'Old Testament' but it replaces it. The new persona revealed in awakening replaces the old figure that now becomes mere shadows, mimesis of the real thing. Similarly, Paul and other Christians imitate the awakening experience of Jesus. In the testimonies of his awakening, Paul would also emphasize the disruption in his life and would distinguish between his old life - in which he persecuted Christians - to the new one; the previously false existence versus the new one in the spirit: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"³⁶ Paul's awakening would in turn set a standard for awakening experiences other follow: moving from a call, to revelation and change as exemplified in the actual physique.

Handelman distinguishes between the focus on the auditory channel for the Jews versus the visual one for the Christians - a heritage, she claims, from the Greek inheritance. The visual bias is reflected already in the theory of language. Aristotle established the claim that words were merely conventional signs that point to the real

³⁶ Cor. 5: 16-18

entity outside, but thoughts were *likeness* of things. Hence, there is the Greek desire to *see*: a concept of thought in terms of the image (idea, *from the Greek* *eidos*, *imago*.) The Christian God was born out of the clash between the Pagans and the Jews. He was a physical image of God, a mediator and a substitution, The Word became Flesh.³⁷ The gerund and condition were replaced with presence and identity. Also in the process of awakening, the change is radical and visible: Like Jesus, Paul was *transfigured*—moving from blindness to a miraculous healing and a renewed ability to literally seeing the actual light.

St. Paul's awakening thus imitates that of Jesus and establishes a pattern for awakening, characterized by radical changes, as well as a particular process moving from a call to visual revelation and transfiguration. The silence, the strong light, and the derision of textuality all suggest an experience that is essentially ineffable. It is impossible to over emphasize the importance of Paul's rhetoric and the centrality of his awakening to the establishment of the Christian Church and Western conceptions of language and divinity. To develop a rhetoric that would bridge the differences between the Jewish and Greek Cultures, Paul establishes extreme dualities between old and new life, the text and spirit through the use of allegory and typology. The dualities are not tolerated and are resolved through the ineffable and textless mediation of Jesus. Substitution and imitation also play an important role – in the same manner in which the New Testament replaces the Old Testament, the new life replaces the old one, love

³⁷ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 17.

replaces suffering, and the spirit replaces the erroneous letter. The new theory is anti-textual and aims at transcendence of language that is now ontological and mimetic.

St. Augustine

The rhetorical foundations and the focus on conversion, set by St. Paul, were further developed by St. Augustine, whose worldview and rhetoric would dominate Christianity and Western culture for years to come. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, in which he formulates his linguistic theory, has become a central text for medieval aesthetics and exegesis. His life story and conversion, as they are meticulously described in *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, would captivate the minds and hearts of many, inspiring them to follow in his footsteps. Augustine's vivid descriptions of his transformation from his pagan Manichean faith into Catholicism, the immense suffering involved and the radical peace and transformation following it, have set a standard for a personal type of writing and for a particular form of awakening. As we shall see, Augustine's linguistic theory is essential for understanding the construction of ineffability in Christianity, and the deep relation between the psychological process of conversion in Jesus and the desire for textual and temporal transcendence.

Allegory and obscurity

Paul, we have seen, fused the Greek and the Jewish influences through allegorical and typological readings of the scriptures. That approach to the texts was further taken by the Church Fathers - namely Philo of Alexandria, Origen and Clement - and has become a dominant rhetorical method in Christian discourse. As a master rhetorician, who was

trained in the Classic philosophies, Augustine was initially adverse to the Scriptures.

However, it was the allegorical hermeneutic that changed his preliminary scorn, playing a part in his conversion:

I began to believe that the Catholic faith, which I had thought impossible to defend against the objections of the Manichees, might fairly be maintained especially since I had heard one passage after another in the Old Testament figuratively explained. These passages had been death to me when I took to them literally, but once I heard them explained in their spiritual meaning I began to blame myself for my despair, at least insofar as it had led me to suppose that it was quite impossible to counter people who hated and derided the law and the prophets.³⁸

I was glad to that at last I had been shown how to interpret the ancient Scriptures of the law and the prophets in a different light from that which had previously made them seem absurd, when I used to criticize your saints for holding beliefs which they had never really held at all. I was pleased to hear that in his sermons to the people. Ambrose often repeated the text: *The written law inflicts death, whereas the spiritual law brings life*, as though this were a rule upon which he wished to insist more carefully. And when he lifted the veil of mystery and disclosed the spiritual meaning of texts which taken literally, appeared to contain the most unlikely doctrines, I was not aggrieved by what he said, although I did not know whether it was true.³⁹

The anti textual approach is further extenuated and serves a guiding rule according to which the literal is equated with death, and the spiritual with life.

Handelman explains that while there was no consensus in the Patristic tradition on the meaning of *literal*, the spiritual level was subdivided into “allegorical” and “analogical,” but even these categories had different definitions. Augustine formulated them as *history* (literal); etiology (a consideration of causes, and of difficult passages for a Christian), *anagogia* (typology, or consideration of congruence between the Old and

³⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, V:14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, VI:4.

new Testaments); and *allegoria* (figurative interpretation, also usually typology.)⁴⁰ It is important that the text was not considered to be simultaneously multi layered in every detail as in Judaism. Rather, the type of text was considered to determine the level of reading applied. It can be generally said that for Augustine and the medieval thought following him, the spiritual meaning was always seen as superior to the other more literal ones.

As a master of rhetoric, Augustine was especially apt for the task of adapting the scriptures and modifying them to the gentile and Latin sensibilities. Once admitting the conceit he felt towards the Scriptures, which in his own mind did not level up to that of Cicero's, Augustine propounded a theory on the "aesthetics of obscurity." The theory, which was developed in book II, chapter 6 of *On Christian Doctrine*, claimed that parts of the Scriptures are intentionally obscure in order to conquer man's pride and their disdain of what can be easily acquired. Augustine does not further explain his claim that men delight more in ideas that are expressed through similitude than by direct statements. However, again, the goal was not to use obscurity for the play of multiple meanings. Obscurity was rather used as an incentive to seek the underlying abstract meaning below the surface of the text, assuming a direct relation between the text and what it signifies. This symbolic pattern has come to dominate medieval art and literature, and has lasting influence even on contemporary work.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption : Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*, Jewish Literature and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 108-09.

⁴¹ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 112-13.

The attempt to seek the underlying meaning of a text, the substitution of a higher reality for the realm of words, and the belief that the text can point to a specific and correct reading outside of it, has its origin, as we have already seen, in Greek thought. The allegorical framework, whether obscure or not, is perpetuated by the assumption that words point to something else. Or as Augustine suggested: “one need not look at the words themselves but at the truth “in” the word, or as pointed to by the words.”⁴² Erich Auerbach writes about this line of thinking in Christianity:

Its detachment from the special preconceptions of the Jewish world, became a necessity and effected by a method rooted in Jewish tradition but now applied with incomparably greater boldness, the method of revisional interpretation. The Old Testament was played down...and assumed the appearance of a series of” figures,” that is of prophetic announcements and anticipation of the coming of Jesus and the concomitant events...The total content of the sacred writings was places in an exegetic context which often removed the thing told very far from its sensory base, in that the reader was forced to turn his attention away from the sensory occurrence and toward its meaning...the antagonism between sensory appearance and meaning...permeates the early, and indeed the whole, Christian view of reality.⁴³

The schism between words and things, the sensory and the ‘spiritual, would become especially important in Augustine’s writings, whose allegorical exegesis and writing has come to dominate medieval philosophy, literature, and art.⁴⁴ As we shall see, this rhetoric plays a part not only in the descriptions of his awakening, but it also shaped it. In the next section I will elaborate on Augustine’s theory of signs and will then proceed to the ways in which his linguistic theory was reflected in the descriptions of his conversion.

⁴² Ibid., 113.

⁴³ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 1953), 48-9. Cited in: Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 111.

⁴⁴ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 111.

Augustine's theory of sign

Unlike the Greek and Latin writers preceding him, St. Augustine discussed language in terms of the theory of signs. Ralph Markus claims that prior to Augustine, the theory of signs was nonlinguistic and was understood in the context of argumentation. In Aristotle's example 'that she is giving milk is a sign that she has lately borne a child.' Signs are forensic and are used to understand the meaning of events and to establish a point. Prior to St. Augustine, the Old Testament was read in the same manner—as signs of the New Testament.⁴⁵ Similarly, the vivid stories in the *Confession* are read as signs of Augustine's inevitable conversion. *The Confessions* is told years after the fact from a Christian perspective according to which everything, even great pain, happens for a reason: "everywhere the greater joy is ushered in by the greater pain."⁴⁶ The great master plan is reflected in the now common faith amongst Charismatic renewals that God opens certain doors and closes others. The failure of Augustine's mother to find him a wife, the failure of commune, the break-up of his common law marriage, his inner struggle and other events are interpreted in hindsight as God's work.⁴⁷ Especially when followed by Augustine's reflecting voice, those episodes become heralding events to what is to come.

Synan points that certain 'events are heralded as a demonstration of supernatural power and activity and are linked to biblical types and patterns.'⁴⁸ One of these important

⁴⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 150.

⁴⁷ Karla. Poewe, "Charismatic Conversion in the Light of Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, ed. Christopher. Lamb, and Bryant, Darrol. M (London: Cassell, 1999).

⁴⁸ Vinson Synan, *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1975), 25.

signs is the symbol of the garden which serves as a sign for what it is to come as the 'literal' garden is an allegorical reminder of the fall and the need to transform. Book VIII of *Confessions* describes the dramatic point in Augustine's awakening in the garden. In two other instances Augustine speaks of gardens. When he was sixteen, he stole fruits from a garden, an experience that made him conscious of his sins. Using an allegorical type of writing, Augustine likens his sin with that of Adam and Eve's and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The other garden scene takes place long after his conversion. He is with his mother shortly before her death and they are both overlooking a garden in Oastia and conversing about celestial things and the Garden of Paradise. The recurring theme of the garden scene in *Confessions* provides the background and context for Augustine's spiritual journey: remorse over sin, surrender to God's will, and celestial bliss. Another significant sign is St. Augustine's reading of St. Paul's and Alipus' conversion stories. In a religion founded on substitution and emulation, this is a significant sign that sets the stage for Augustine's own transformation. The pattern of conversion and the miraculous power of God serve as heralding events as well as models of conversion for Augustine's conversion.

However, St. Augustine's use of signs goes beyond that. To cope with challenges in readings of the scriptures, Augustine was the first to apply the theory of signs to the linguistic realm.⁴⁹ Applying the mimetic theory of language and the anti textual stance to the theory of signs, Augustine distinguishes between words and things (or realities). He

⁴⁹ R. A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," in *Augustine; a Collection of Critical Essays, Modern Studies in Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.,: Anchor Books, 1972), 64.

further divides the category of things to final goals that can be enjoyed for their own sake, and means for achieving these goals. For Augustine, only God is such a final goal. Words are useful only as far as they help promote love for God or the neighbor; if the texts do not help in achieving that end—then they are not valid (I: 36). The understanding and appreciation of things, is always apart from that of words.

If, in Judaism, there was no separation between words and things, in Augustine's theory of signs we begin to see the referential model coming into its own. Book II chapter 1 of *On Christian Doctrine* begins by Augustine's telling us that "A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the sense. Thus if we see a track, we think of the animal that made the track..." For Augustine, letters are signs of words and written words signify spoken words, which in turn signify things.⁵⁰ The parallel with Aristotle's formulation of this relation at the beginning of *De Interpretatione* is readily apparent. Aristotle claimed that spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks are symbols of spoken sounds. Neither written nor spoken sounds in Aristotle's view were the same for all men, but that which they are signs of—affections in the soul—are universal. There are, however, some important differences between Aristotle and Augustine, as B. Jackson points out.⁵¹ Augustine introduces the hierarchy embedded in the figurative slant of the Christian Church since for him, the thing is more important than the sign designating it. Moreover, Augustine does not say that words are signs of movements of the soul or that the relation

⁵⁰ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 114-15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

between words and things is based on likeness. Augustine's understanding of signs as pointing to an external referent and as hierarchically organized with things being superior to auditory signs that are, in turn, superior to written signs—has shaped the logocentric tendency of Western thought criticized by Derrida.

Duality and Ineffability

The crucial movement for Augustine in the interpretation of the Scriptures is from a word to a thing. Consequently, *On Christian Doctrine* becomes the laudation not of words, but of things. It is this referential and ontological understanding of language, and it is the allegorical trope at the basis of Christian exegesis that have constructed the very notion of ineffability. Augustine strikes a marked distinction between signs and the things they point to; between the ultimate goal as God, and the inferior words that can only function as means for the higher, divine goal. In his *Confessions*, Augustine would emphasize the superiority of spirit over text. However, he would not stop there and construct other dualities based on this basic one. Not only are words and text opposites in Augustine's view, but the materiality of the body is distinctly inferior to that of the mind and temporality is constructed in opposition to the more desired infinity.

What have I said, my God, my Life, my holy sweetness? What does any man succeed in saying when he attempts to speak to you? Yet woe to those who do not speak to you at all when those who speak must say nothing.⁵²

Silence is the realm of the transcendent God, while words belong to the temporary human. When the Bishop of Hippo inquires as to how God had created the world by word he concludes:

⁵² Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, I, 4, 19.

And those words of yours, created in time, were reported by the outer ear to the intelligent soul, where inner ear established to your eternal word...which is in silence...therefore nothing in your words can pass away and be replaced, because your word is truly immortal and eternal.⁵³

Within this framework, temporal life is perceived as human and unsatisfactory in contrast to the infinite divine truth: “eternity delights us, and the pleasure of temporal good holds us down below.”⁵⁴

The mind and the body are also separated with the superiority of the first: “and more easily did my body obey the weakest willing of my soul, in moving its limbs at its nod, than the soul obeyed itself to accomplish...the mind commands the body, and it obeys instantly”⁵⁵ suggesting that the body is related to the temporal pleasures and the mind to the eternal and divine truth. Augustine uses images of the soul becoming “distended” and swelling” like a diseased tumor, until it eventually bursts open and “spews forth its insides.”⁵⁶ O'Connell claims that for Augustine humanity's original sin was the fall of a contemplative soul into the fleeting distractions of time and temporality. For this reason, the most telling description of the soul happens at the climax of his discussion on eternity and time. In *Ego in tempora dissilui*, Augustine said that he “leapt into times” implying that prior to that leap he was “out of time” and “at home” in God's eternity.⁵⁷ Thus, the fall of the soul into the mortal body is identical for Augustine with the fall into time.

⁵³ Ibid., XI, 6-7, 262-3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁶ Quoted in, Robert J. O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 248.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 249.

Rather than viewing states of mind as a scale, Augustine uses the metaphor of sleep and wakefulness to create another sharp dichotomy between two states of mind. The contrast between sleep and wakefulness relates to the dualistic framework of thinking as lethargy is associated with confusion thus evoking the need to wake up: “I meditated on Thee were like the efforts of such as would awake, who yet overcome with a heavy drowsiness, are again drenched therein. And as no one would sleep for ever, and in all man’s sober judgment waking is better.”⁵⁸

While Augustine equates his previous state of mind to sleep, his inner struggle prior to his awakening is represented as war between his own will and the tendency of his ‘sickness’ to turn away from God.⁵⁹

I was at strife with myself, and rent asunder by myself. And this rent befell me against my will, and yet indicated, not the presence of another mind, but the punishment of my own. Therefore it was no more I than wrought it, but sin that dwelt in me; the punishment of a sin more freely committed, in that I was a son of Adam.⁶⁰

Influenced by his Manichaeism background, Augustine interprets the struggle as taking place between lust and continence.⁶¹ The external distinction between good and evil, darkness and light is mirrored within Augustine himself. Thus, his confusion and inner struggle is categorically portrayed as a conflict “between two contrary principles one good, and the other bad.”⁶² The suffering and delusion would abruptly cease with the victory of light over the darkness due to the inspiration of the scriptures:

⁵⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 153.

⁵⁹ Bryant, "Conversion in Christianity: From without and from Within."

⁶⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 162.

⁶¹ Poewe, "Charismatic Conversion in the Light of Augustine's *Confessions*."

⁶² Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 163.

I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my head, all the darkness of the doubt vanished away.⁶³

Within the mimetic and allegorical frame of reference described above, textual obscurity was not understood to be opportunity for the play of multiplicity, but was a problem to be solved. The joy Augustine derived from obscurity was not the pleasure of the many, but the satisfaction of ‘unveiling the mystery,’ of realizing the ‘correct’ meaning of the texts, of decoding the things pointed to by the signs. The underlying assumption was that a distinction exists between a substantial origin and its imitation, true and false, reality and illusion. This pattern is expressed in the confessions in a few ways. To begin with, the turmoil and anguish experienced by Augustine are understood within this framework as hindrances from revealing one’s ‘true’ nature. The desired movement would, therefore, be from the delusional state towards the original and pure source. Indeed, in various sections in the book, Augustine expresses a desire to ‘fully’ live, the present difficulties are not embraced, but are perceived as hindrances to be unveiled: “Only I was healthfully distracted and dying, to live.”⁶⁴

The distinction between an origin and mimesis is expressed also in the distinction between “real” and “illusion.” Book VIII alternates between Augustine’s feelings at the time the story takes place and the retrospective voice; together, both voices create a fantastic experience. The readers follow Augustine through the same foggy lens of

⁶³ Ibid., book XIII, p.167.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 160.

extreme emotions and turmoil. The metaphor of the garden in its various connotations, the image of Lady Contenance, as well as the voice calling Augustine to open the book and read all add to the dream-like impression. However, all of this characterizes Augustine before he ‘wakes up’ from the dream. Once Augustine responds to the call, reads the book and surrenders to Christ—as if by a shot of light he transforms. The end of the previous delusion is symbolized through a serene closure of the volume from which he was reading. The new and bright life as a convert of a church now begins.

Ineffability

In a metaphysics that distinguishes between words and things, body and mind, temporality and infinity, dream and wakefulness, illusion and the real, old and new life—the next step is to distinguish between text and everything that cannot be talked about. Words are limited and human while the divine assumes to transcend textuality all together. In various theological writings the apophatic and ineffable thrust of the divine in Augustine is accepted as a given. However, it is my contention that ‘ineffability’ is not a starting point. Rather, ineffability is constructed due to the very use of allegory. Moreover, the type of ineffability constructed by Augustine is not an underlying basis as in Judaism nor is it avoided because of language’s inclination to create identification with false identities as in Buddhism. Ineffability is here contrasted to speech and the human.

Augustine describes the ineffable in two main ways: through the use of abstract sensory experiences (that have an abstract ‘essence’ to begin with) which are taken to the extreme and then transcended. The second and important rhetorical move in Augustine is the emphasis on ‘silence.’

He is the light, the melody, the fragrance, the food, the embrace of my inner self there where is a brilliance that space cannot contain, a sound that time cannot carry away, a perfume that no breeze disperse, a taste undiminished by eating, a clinging together that no satiety will sunder.⁶⁵

Elsewhere Augustine describes divinity through the use of negative language and paradoxes:

Good without quality, as great without quantity, as the creator who lacks nothing, who rules but from no position, and who contains all things without an external form, as being whole everywhere without limitation of space, as eternal without time, as making mutable things without any change in himself, and as being without passion. Whoever so thinks of God, even though he does not yet discover all that can be known about him, nevertheless, by his pious frame of mind avoids, as far as possible, the danger of thinking anything about him which he is not.⁶⁶

The paradoxes follow the pattern described before—familiar categories of thinking and their consequent transcendence (e.g., great without quantity). Rather than stripping and deconstructing thought altogether, and in a manner similar to the Zen koans, the ineffable refers to something that exists ontologically beyond the familiar modes of thinking and being in the world. Westphal explains: “Theism is committed to a God who, as creator in ontologically transcendent, but not to a God who is epistemically immanent.”⁶⁷

Another important way in which Augustine refers to the ineffable, especially in the context of his own awakening, is that of silence. Since words belong to the mortal realm, it is only through silence that one can access the ‘beyond.’ Since the gap between a word and a thing is exacerbated in Augustine and later Christian thought, the movement

⁶⁵ Ibid., x, 215.

⁶⁶ *De trinitate*, cited in: Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God : Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition : Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs (Louvain [Grand Rapids, Mich.]: Peeters Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 269.

⁶⁷ Merold Westphal, *Transcendence and Self-Transcendence : On God and the Soul*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 96.

in interpretation and in expression is thus from a sign to a thing and then to the divine silence. As Joseph Mazzeo puts it:

Thus the true rhetoric culminates in silence, in which the mind is in immediate contact with reality... Whether or not the text was obscure, the movement of thought was through words to the realities themselves, from temporal realities to eternal realities, from talk to silence, from discourse to vision.⁶⁸

Due to the nominal substitution in Augustinian philosophy and the expectation for balance between language and the thing it refers to, the goal is to find the perfect sign that would predicate the divine essence. To go beyond' the text and find God's voice, Augustine finds it necessary to remain silent. In other words, silence functions here as a sign that points to the Word of God.⁶⁹ Since Augustine realizes that his own words are transitory, he comes to the conclusion that God's word is eternal. Here, Augustine uses a spatial perception of silence in contrast to the temporal word: 'God's word abide[s] in yourself forever, without becoming old, making all things new!⁷⁰' To hear God's voice, Augustine decides that he must remain silent and once he 'hears God's silence he is filled with joy:

If to any man the tumult of the flesh were to grow silent, silent the images of earth and water an air, and the poles of heaven silent also, if the soul herself were to be silent and, by not thinking of self, were to transcend self: if all dreams and imagined revelations were silent and every tongue, every sign, if there was utter silence from everything which exists only to pass away... but suppose that, having said this and directed out attention to Him that made them, they too were to become hushed and He Himself alone were to speak, not by their voice but in His own, and we were to hear His word, not through any tongue of flesh or voice

⁶⁸ Joseph Mazzeo, "St. Augustine Rhetoric of Silence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (1962).

⁶⁹ Angelo Caranafa, "Silence and Spiritual Experience in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Claudel," *Literature & Theology* 18, no. 2 (2004): 187.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 190.

of an angel or sound of thunder or difficult allegory, but that we might hear Him in Himself... Would not this be: *Enter into The Master's Joy?*⁷¹

Again, silence is described in as spatial and is contrasted with all that is temporary and physical. Since time is perceived here as linear, infinity must according to this frame of thinking be beyond time. One way to contrast time is with space that assumes an ontological presence that is not necessarily transitory. Silence also plays a role in the process of awakening since the revelation in the garden takes place after silent reflection. Consequently, silence in Augustine is a key to transformation and awakening. However, silence still assumes an ontological presence.

The fusion of the Greek *Logos* with the Hebrew *davar* had shaped Christianity and can further explain this reification of signs and silence into 'things.' The doctrine of the *logos* can to a large extent be attributed to Philo, the Alexandrian Jew who merged Judaism and Greek philosophy and had profound influence over the Church. Philo took from Aristotle the idea of *nous*, the thinking of soul or mind and substituted for it the term *logos* (*word, reason, explanation, etc*) thus making *logos* the equivalence of God's essence. From Plato, he took the idea that all things are created by *logos* (i.e., a reason) and a divine knowledge which comes from God, thus making *logos* equivalent to a divine mind and a first principle of creation. This interpretation was in line with some statements from the Scriptures such as Ps 33:6, that "by the word of God the heavens were established." For Philo, the *logo* has two stages: in the first it existed within God

⁷¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, IX, 201-2.

and was identifiable with Him. In the second, it was a created incorporeal being which existed outside of God and was imminent in the world.⁷²

Philo's *logos* was taken by Paul, John and the Church Fathers, but was altered in some profound ways as to substitute God for the actual figure of Jesus. In the Jewish tradition, a few references were made in the aggadah to the preexistence of the Messiah and to a personified figure of wisdom. St. Paul identified the preexistent wisdom with the preexistent Messiah and claimed that the revelation of the law of Moses and the birth of Jesus were two stages in the earthly revelations of the preexistent wisdom.⁷³ The first stage was taken to be the written Torah and the second one the body of Jesus. The letter was again displaced for a literal figure, the body of Jesus. This Philonic theory, of the *logos* as associated with the body of Jesus according to Paul, was described in the famous statement by John: "in the beginning was the *logos* and the *logos* became flesh." However, in St. Paul, John, and other Church Fathers the *logos* attained a state of presence that did not exist in Philo and the Jewish tradition. For Philo, "the *logos* was imminent in the world as a guiding principle or instrument of divine providence; it was that through which the laws of nature operate, and the career of the *logos* ends there."⁷⁴ For the Church Fathers, however, the *logos*, had literally become flesh and after John's statement, the *logos* was literally begotten out of God and was identified with God. Hadelman explains that in Christianity, God was seen not as a creator, but as the begetter of the earthly Jesus and the preexistent *logos* was seen as something that is

⁷² Hadelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

literally generated. St. Paul's statement that Christ was equal with God and John's statement the logos was God were, therefore, taken literally thus creating a system in which the preexistent Christ was not merely divine but was God.

Here we can see the beginning of the theory of trinity that had important implications to the understanding of language. In Jewish thought the unity of God was absolute, unknowable and, ultimately, beyond definition. It was not unity not in terms of *ousia*, being, substance or *res*; it was a unity that underlined everything, but not as substance. Therefore the problem of many-in-one, which was so central in Greek philosophy, did not occupy Jewish philosophers. The Hebrew *davar* (word, thing) also was not a *res*, being in the Greek sense. The essential contrast between sign and things did not exist and there was no need for mediation. Reality was already divinely verbal, but not as substance.⁷⁵ These insights are clearly reflected in Augustine's writings, in which the rift between signs and things lead to metaphysics – wherein silence is divine and at the same time ontological. The unity Augustine seeks to establish between the two different realms of thought are taken to be the merging of substances rather than an underlying essence.

The Incarnation

John Durham observes that it is remarkable how often Augustine's discussion of language accompany his discussions of the incarnation.⁷⁶ This should not come to us as a surprise since the theory of incarnation is not separate from Augustine's linguistic theory;

⁷⁵ Ibid., 102, 04.

⁷⁶ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air : A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 96.

rather, incarnation serves as a solution to the problem of language. An unbridgeable gap is experienced between things and words and the other dualities following this basic one: between spirit and word, the body and mind, temporality and infinity, good and evil, light and darkness. This is because, for Augustine, human language is decisively separate from the divine word and is indicative of the fall, the desires of the flesh and the imprisonment in temporality. Augustine's metaphysics does not present us with a series of differences that can simultaneously function, but with an unbridgeable and unbearable gap between everything that is seen as human and imperfect to their 'spiritual' counterparts.

The opposites are reflected within Augustine himself and the tension between them reaches its pick before Augustine's decisive point of conversion. It is crucial that Augustine is not comfortable with the myriad voices and is yearning for peace and union with God: "Thus soul-sick was I, and tormented, accusing myself much more severely than my wont, rolling and turning me in my chain, till that were wholly broken... For I said it within myself: "Be it done now, be it done now."⁷⁷ In Augustine, we can fully see the dialectics of suffering and love; the human anguish and the divine peace. The culminating suffering paves the way for the change and functions as a heralding sign for the decision to change and the ultimate coming of love in Jesus Christ. The incarnation appears here as a rhetorical solution to both the linguistic and the psychological crisis.

Since an unbridgeable gap is constructed between what is experienced as an original truth to its intolerable and tormented imperfection, incarnation bridges this otherwise unfathomable abyss. Handelman writes: "God descends into human language,

⁷⁷ Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, Book XIII, p.164.

into human time and history: the word becomes flesh. And this doctrine becomes the only possible escape from man's exile into language."⁷⁸ The gap between the signifier and the signified, the substance and its representation can finally become one. The incarnation rather than the text becomes a visual mediation between opposites. Since *The Word* is considered superior to the multiplicity of human words, ontological silence and the sacraments—signs literally made flesh - become the preferred solution. Margaret Ferguson further explains, "Incarnation does not redeem language itself; rather, the incarnation guarantees the end of language because it promises the possibility of an ultimate transcendence of time."⁷⁹ The end of language is the end of all that is associated with human' imperfection: the sin, and temporality. Jesus is the ultimate signifier that resists signification all together. The Incarnation replaces the previous textual thrust of the Jews. Accordingly, Augustine's awakening is dramatic and his new life now replaces his old one. The absolute presence of silence replaces the multiple voices and the noise of words. The word becomes flesh as Augustine 'awakens' to his new life *in* Jesus and experiences an ineffable union.

Summary

Augustine's linguistic theory and process of awakening are interrelated. Through the use of allegory and typology, Augustine constructs metaphysics of opposites that is founded on a mimetic and ontological view of language. Signs are contrasted to things, language to spirit, good to bad, darkness to evil, and temporality to infinity. The desired

⁷⁸ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 120.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, "Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language," 861.

movement in therefore always from one side of the equation towards the origins that exist outside the text: the original nature of the soul and the timeless divinity. The image of incarnation appears as the mediator of the otherwise unbridgeable gaps. It is simultaneously beyond signification and as a visual image of change.

Ineffability is rhetorically constructed here due to the very same allegorical and metaphysical worldview—it is presented as the opposite of words, and the earthly and the equivalent of the *beyond*- the word of God. Ineffability is equated with the need to transcend the text towards some original identity. The ineffable divinity and awakening experience are therefore expressed by Augustine through the same superseding tropes: longing for the silence that is beyond words, the use of human categories and their transcendence, and a literal claim that the end goal is that which is beyond signification. However, all these means remain visual, and attain an absolute presence. For this reason Derrida therefore criticized Augustine's ineffability as ontological and as maintaining a relation to a transcendental signifier that exists somewhere beyond the text.

Augustine's awakening arises as an answer to a call. While his inner struggle mirrors the dual metaphysics he has constructed, in his awakening all tensions are resolved. Ultimately, his struggle and conversion also mimics the previous conversion narratives of St. Paul and Jesus. In agreement with the principle of substitution, many great mystics would identify with St. Augustine and follow his footsteps. Theresa De Avila famously wrote more than a thousand years later:

When I started reading the Confessions it seemed to make that I was seeing my own self right there. When I got as far as his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it was just as if the Lord gave it to me, too, to judge from

the grief that filled my heart. For a long time I was wholly undone by my weeping, and with Augustine's very same love and anguish within my own self, too...⁸⁰

In the next section I jump more than a thousand years later and look into the more contemporary awakening of Charles G. Finney in whom we will see the use of similar trope that by then have become neutralized and accepted as the natural order of things.

Charles G. Finney

The story of Charles G. Finney is the next step in the trajectory this chapter tries to delineate between ancient and more contemporary awakening stories, especially in the context of American Christianity. Finney was born in 1792, converted at the age of twenty nine and has become one of the most widely known of the many great revival preachers during the Second Awakening and the pre-civil war in the US. At age forty three he moved to Oberlin, Ohio where he became professor of theology and later the president of the College. In *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, Mark Noll ranks Finney with "Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Carnegir... as one of the most important public figures in nineteenth-century America."⁸¹

The word "*evangelical*" has its etymological root in the Greek *euangelion*, which means gospel, or "good news." To be an Evangelical therefore meant belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ: his life and resurrection as they are narrated in the New Testament. After Martin Luther's reformation the word came to mean those who believed in the possibility of salvation for an otherwise sinful community through faith in Jesus. *Evangelicalism* has

⁸⁰ Quoted in Bryant, "Conversion in Christianity: From without and from Within," 184.

⁸¹ Cited in: Charles Hambrick-Stowe, E. , *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).

thus become distinguished from the more sacramental and priestly faith of traditional Roman Catholic Christianity. The focus has changed from religious ritual to preaching of the gospels and a personal commitment of faith. Current use of the term *evangelical* goes back to the spiritual awakenings in the British Isles and North America in the early and middle 1700s. In the English colonies that have become the United States, these revivals were called the Great Awakening. According to Hambrick-Stowe, the most influential preacher at these times of all was George Whitefield who addressed huge crowds from different social classes. His teachings of the Gospels were simple and direct: everyone is sinful and must repent, but salvation may be gained freely through belief in Jesus Christ. With his targeted message, extemporaneous speaking and dramatic style, Whitefield has created the modern revival tradition. Evangelism has consequently become a massive popular movement integral to the American culture.

Charles Finney was an Evangelical, at a time in which evangelical Protestantism had strong religious, as well cultural, political and economic influences. He was a significant figure in this tradition because - being theologically conservative and socially progressive - he held together different elements of the evangelical religion that have become separated after his death. He practiced "conversion preaching, racial justice, women's rights, education reform, abstinence from alcohol and stimulants, the holiness movement, the second blessing and higher Christian life, baptism of the Holy Ghost, ecclesiastical independence, impatience with doctrinal conservatism, progressive theology, the life of prayer, criticism of government, advocacy of civil disobedience, and

aloofness from politics.”⁸² He did not embrace the post-millennial thrust of the Great Awakening and did not accept all element of the evangelical movement, but he was a relentless preacher and passionate to convert others in the spirit of his own conversion.

Following his conversion, Finney became a key theoretician who taught that revivals were not miraculous events, but voluntary ones. The stress was on immediate conversion, through sustained prayer and repentance. In spite of belief in the centrality of the Bible, salvation was believed to come solely through the cross of Christ.⁸³ Finney’s own conversion is in synchronicity with this pattern. The story of his conversion was told on many gatherings and sermons, but was eventually written and published as a part of his memoirs in order to change what he perceived as misconceptions of his experience and life work. Initially, Finney expressed objections to publishing his experiences, claiming that he dislike autobiographies and that the events of his life were of no importance. However, confronting misunderstandings of the early revival movements, and meeting objections from within the Church - to his efforts to broaden the revival movement - gradually changed his mind. Finney finally yielded to writing his memoires towards the end of his life, but these were published only after his death.

Finney’s conversion appears at the beginning of his memoires and set the tone for the entire book: his genuine commitment and the model of conversion that would be later emphasized in the grand revivals. As in the case of St. Paul and St. Augustine, Charles, G. Finney’s conversion serves a rhetorical purpose – the personal example and depth of

⁸² *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁸³ Flinn, "Conversion: Up from Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience."

sincerity serve as an argument for the validity of the teachings as well as the ethos of the narrator and movement they have come to represent. I begin this section by describing the process of Finney's conversion as it is described in his memoirs, and then move to analyzing the ways in which he constructs his experiences.

The Process

Charles G. Finney has compared his own conversion to that of St. Paul. Indeed, Finney's conversion follows the familiar format of a dramatic and decisive transfiguration as a response to a call. Although the apex of his transformation has lasted only a couple of days, the actual process has begun with his move to Adams and the exposure to the religious community in the area. After a period of hesitation and inner conflict between what Finney perceived as two courses of life—belief in Christ as was presented in the Gospels or a worldly way of life, Finney sets on the course of settling the inner conflict

Having resolved on a Sabbath night to find salvation to his soul, Finney immersed himself in reading of the Bible. Although his conviction grew on Monday and Tuesday nights, Finney still felt as if his 'heart grew harder.' A growing sense of despair plagued him and a feeling "as if I was about to die," stressed him even more since that would mean going to hell. Although he managed to quiet himself on some level, other questions arose with more urgency: "as if an inward voice said to me, 'What are you waiting for? Did you not promise to give your heart to God?'" Consequently, Finney became acutely aware of the exigency of his commitment and began to see the Gospels and Christ as a gift that is already perfect and is just waiting for his consent. In one of the dramatic

moments of his awakening – Finney responds to this realization, stops in the middle of the street where an inner voice arrests him. “The question seemed to be put: ‘Will you accept it *now, to-day?*’ I replied, ‘Yes; I will accept it to-day, or I will die in the attempt.’”⁸⁴

Determined to change, yet ashamed to pray and pour his soul in public, Finney walks north of the village to a grove of woods, where he resolves to give his heart to God. He realizes, yet again, that his heart would not pray. Verging close to despair he says to himself: “My heart is dead to god, and will not pray.”⁸⁵ An intense inner struggle had erupted in him. He was torn between despair, shame and a deep feeling of guilt and sin due to his commitment to convert or die. The struggle and awful awareness of his sin brought Finney to a breaking point – he fell down to his knees and started praying from his heart: “Just at this point,” he recounts, “this passage of scripture seemed to drop into my mind with a flood of light: ‘Then shall ye go and pray for me, when you search for me with all your heart.’”⁸⁶ At this moment, Finney realizes that faith is a voluntary trust and not an intellectual state. The economic metaphor of gift was again used as Finney suddenly felt offered loads of gifts and benedictions by the spirit.” Finney describes in some length his conversation with the spirit and the commitments made: “I told the Lord that I should take Him at His Word, and that He could not lie; and that therefore I was not

⁸⁴ Finney, Rosell, and Dupuis, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney : The Complete Restored Text*, 18.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

sure that he heard my prayer, and He would be found of me.⁸⁷ Finney promises ‘with great emphasis, *If I am ever converted, I will preach the Gospel*⁸⁸

Having prayed all day, Finney is filled with a deep feeling of peace and serenity enveloped him: “I found I was so quiet and peaceful that I tried to feel concerned about it.”⁸⁹ The feeling of peace was intertwined with growing sensitivity: “I wondered what ailed me that I felt such disposition to weep.”⁹⁰ That sweet tenderness lasted for a while and when Finney played music and prayed in another room he had a feeling he had met with Jesus Christ face to face. At this point Finney describes in some length the physical sensation of electrical waves washing over him and later compares it to ‘a baptism of the Holy Spirit.’ The irresistible spasms washed over him and were accompanied by deep feelings love and joy.

The future occurrences proved Finney’s conversion and commitment. As soon as one of his neighbors listened to his report of his experience to the elders of the Church, he fell on his knees and asked Finney to pray for him. For the first time in his life, Finney not only prayed in public, but joined others in prayer for someone else. In spite of qualms regarding his adequacy, Finney would soon relinquish his profession as a lawyer and would commit his life to preaching and converting of others in the fashion of his own transformation.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

It is important to contextualize Charles Finney's awakening, not as a part of a surge of evangelical conversions around Adams. During the Great Awakening, ordinary people such as Sarah Osborn and Nathan Cole wrote spiritual autobiographies, with conversion narratives very similar in structure and rhetoric to Finney's.⁹¹ Although Finney may not have read all these stories, he had probably heard of them in religious gatherings. The Jonathan Edwards's edition of *The Life of David Brainerd*, although published in 1749, was still very popular during Finney's life time and became the archetypical narrative for many Congregationalists and Presbyterians, as they moved west in the 1800s.⁹² The two conversion stories are markedly similar and provide an opportunity for comparison.

Brainerd was just turning twenty when "it pleased God, on one Sabbath day morning, as I was walking out for some secret duties (as I remember) to give me on a sudden such a sense of my danger and the wrath of God, that I stood amazed and my former good frames, that I had pleased myself with, all pleasantly vanished; and from the view that I had of my sin and vileness, I was much distressed all that day, fearing the vengeance of God would soon overtake me." For months Brainerd reeled between hope and despair, but finally, "while I was walking in a solitary place as usual, I at once saw that all my contrivances and projections to effect or procure deliverance and salvation for myself were utterly in vain." The following Sabbath evening "walking again the same solitary place," Brainerd "was attempting to pray; but found no heart to engage in that, or

⁹¹ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*.

⁹² *Ibid.*

any other duty. Afraid “the spirit of God had quite left me,” in utter humility he experienced a sudden breakthrough. “As I was walking in a dark thick grove, ‘unspeakable glory’ seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul...I stood still and wondered and admired!”⁹³

The fears of sin and his heart’s dumbness as well as the wonderful revelation on a solitary stroll are almost identical to Finney’s report. Bernard even described similar sensations of deep joy and love that lasted for a few days and set him on a new religious path in his life. The Methodist evangelist, Peter Cartwright, also described his conversion as a youth in Kentucky in his *Autobiography* (1856), in an account very similar to that of Charles Finney. After feeling convicted of sin, Cartwright “retired to the horse-lot...wringing my hands in great anguish, trying to pray, on the borders of utter despair.” Grace flashed over him “quick as electric shock,” but a few days later, when retired to a cave” on his father’s farm, he was still seeking salvation. Finally, three months later he attended a camp meeting, where he “went, with weeping multitudes, and bowed before the stand, and earnestly prayed for mercy.” Cartwright heard God’s voice offering forgiveness.”⁹⁴

Finney’s awakening not only served as inspiration for future generations, but was inspired and constructed in a very particular way, due to previous awakening stories to which he was exposed. In his Memoires, discussions and sermons dealing with his conversion, Finney was aware of the fact that his story fits a long-established pattern of

⁹³ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 15.

conversion stories - dating back to the seventh-century Puritanism, and all the way back to the Bible and the way he interpreted Paul's redemption. In the next sections, I describe in more detail the rhetorical elements in Finney's awakening and the way he addresses the problem of ineffability. I begin by the construction of ineffability and Finney's rhetorical solutions to the problem, the dialectics of suffering and love and the dual metaphysics that informs Finney's awakening, the textual and emotional mediation of Jesus, transfiguration, substitution and the emphasis on visual imagery in the memoirs.

Ineffability

We have seen, in this chapter, the ways in the allegorical and typological methods of interpretation adopted by the Church have shaped a metaphysics that is based on contradicting forces. Within this framework of thinking, we have identified the opposition between spirit and text and the belief that human words are insufficient and distinct from the divine ones. This pattern of thought appears also in Finney's memoirs, as an underlying assumption, which informs his writing. To begin with, Finney compares the human words to the divine one in numerous places: "I should take him at His Word, and that He could not lie."⁹⁵ However, while the divine Word, is constructed as eternal, solid and perfect, the human words are inherently insufficient: "I never can, in words, make any human being understand how precious and true those promises appeared to me;⁹⁶ on his peace of mind: "The repose of my mind was unspeakably great. I never can

⁹⁵ Finney, Rosell, and Dupuis, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney : The Complete Restored Text*, 21.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

describe it in words,"⁹⁷ and on his physical sensations: "I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushing of my heart."⁹⁸ The new beginning is beyond words: "no words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart, it seemed to me that I could burst⁹⁹;" The beauty of the sunrise concluding the strong experience is again described as ineffable: "words cannot express the impression that this sunlight made upon me."¹⁰⁰

Unlike the linguistic theory informing Paul and St Augustine, it becomes more difficult to trace the reasoning informing the marked division and the hierarchy of human and 'divine' words in Finney's. This pattern of thinking appears not as a cause of explanation but as an underlying worldview that is accepted as a given and informs Finney's descriptions and experience. Moreover, ineffability is now addressed more directly and the claims for inexpressibility are used as an adjective extenuating a given description. For example, in "the repose of my mind was unspeakably great," 'unspeakably' could be replaced with another adjective such as 'super.' However, within the distinctly Christian context of Finney's conversion, the claim for ineffability substitutes for divinity that is contrasted with human existence.

Finney does not make a direct connection between silence and God's word in the same manner that we have seen in St. Augustine, but the equation between silence and God appears as a subtext. For example, while the previous inner struggle is compared to a noisy storm, the peace and silence are equated with the divine revelation: "I walked

⁹⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 25.

quietly toward the village; and so perfectly quiet was my mind that it seemed as if all nature listened.”¹⁰¹ The ways to enter the ecstatic state were through the revelation of Jesus, and later through sacred music - a form of non-conceptual language. Human words alone were not sufficient and have even been a hindrance to an honest prayer and interaction with God.

It is also notable that after each climatic experience, Finney requires some time of silent meditation for which he cannot find words to describe. The resolution to change is expressed as an inner dialogue and is followed by a silent meditation during the night. An external call to change in the present moment is followed by silent meditation in the middle of the street. The inner struggle and prayer are followed by another ‘external’ call in the image of the scriptures and this is replaced with physical sensations, silent meditations and culminates in more physical sensations. The pendulum of silence and speech - a dialogue that is replaced by silent meditation which gives room for transformation - supports John Welwood’s claim, according to which a movement from moments of silence to speech are necessary to the process of articulate a meaningful experience. Interpreting this description in the context of cognitive psychology would yield that the experience itself was not beyond words, as Finney finds multiple adjectives from within the Christian hermeneutics to describe it. The experience rather precedes words and any ‘I’ that knows. However, it is notable that, for Finney, ineffability and silence point to an external identifiable source—God or Jesus—as the source of the inspiration and experience.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 21.

Duality

As in the case of St. Augustine we can find in Finney's conversion a dual system, in which humanity is equated with sin, storm, suffering and darkness, while divinity is revealed through light (another symbol of infinity), redemption, ineffability and transcendence. That system is reflected within Finney's mental structure. While his emotional turmoil at the outset of the chapter is described in length, the wonderful sensations following it are often accompanied by disclaimers that the experience is beyond human words as well as peace and silence. While moments of confusion are associated with darkness: "this suggestion brought a kind of darkness over my mind," the revelations are often accompanied by strong light—a symbol of infinity throughout the testimonies explored in this chapter so far. The dual system is not clarified or elaborated by Finney but is simply described as a given, as an underlying metaphysical system at the basis of thought.

The distinction between truth and illusion becomes pronounced as Finney repeatedly associates his revelation with a growing sense of assurance and Truthfulness: "I had intellectually believed the Bible before; but never has the truth been in my mind, that faith was a voluntary trust,"¹⁰² and "I knew that it was God's Word and God's voice, as it were that spoke to me."¹⁰³ These sentences reflect the same duality between the human word and God's word and as before, it is God's Word that is associated with candor and the heart's intuition: "I told the Lord that I should take Him at His Word, and

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

that He could not lie,”¹⁰⁴ and on God’s promises:” they did not seem so much to fall into my *intellect* as into my *heart*.”¹⁰⁵ As in Augustine before him, divinity for Finney is constructed as transcendent and ineffable, at the same time is it literalized and taken at face value—the Word exists here ontologically as an unmistakable Truth.

Mediation and Embodiment

The tension between the elements of sin, confusion and despair versus the light and the longing for peace and redemption reaches its apex when Finney announces that he ‘cannot take it any longer.’ The threshold experience reaches a boiling-point-of-no-return, when Finney uses the familiar metaphor of death and transformation in declaring that he is about to die. The immense suffering paves the way to the antithesis in the actual image of love: meeting with Jesus himself: “it seemed as if I met the lord Jesus Christ *face to face*.”¹⁰⁶ Not only is the figure of God and the Word reified, but the actual transformation, as well. Even the physical sensations Finney experiences in his dramatic moments of transformation are contextualized in Christian terminology and become figurative. For example, the waves of electricity that wash over him are interpreted as baptism of the Holy spirit and as “the *breath of God*, I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to *fan* me.”¹⁰⁷ The strong sensations are described in the visual imagery of baptism, hinting again to the altering and physical transformation that has just taken place.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 24.

Jesus appears in a visual form; nevertheless, his revelation is beyond the order of this world and is unspeakable. Jesus appears in the scene as the ultimate signifier that is beyond signification, but is embodied, and significantly for this research: appears and described through visual metaphors. In reifying God, the incarnated Jesus becomes the mediator of the otherwise un-reconciled differences. Due to the mediation of Jesus in the act of revelation described, the previous dualities are now reconciled: suffering is now substituted with unspeakable joy; the dark night is replaced with unspeakable bright sunrise. In fact, Finney's new life now substitutes his old one. Thanks to Jesus' mediation, the fear of death Finney expresses at the beginning of the chapter turns out to be death to his previous identity and re-birth, as a Christian. Finney compared his own conversion to that of sinners such as Saul, otherwise known as St. Paul. Signs in his Memoires hint at the upcoming change in the manner similar to that of Paul. Similar to his dramatic transfiguration, Charles Finney goes through physical experiences that changed his life forever, making him a servant of the Church.

Substitution

We have seen in previous sections of this chapter that the element of substitution was prevalent in Christian thinking since its principal system is based on metaphoric thinking, in which one system substitutes for another. In Finney we can see the prevalent metaphor of night describing suffering and sin while morning and death symbolize an end and a new beginning. The metaphor of death arises already in the beginning of the conversion narrative and serves as a sign for the dramatic transformation that is about to take place: "On Tuesday night I had become very nervous and in the night a strange

feeling came over me as if I was about to die.”¹⁰⁸ The fear of death would prove substantial, as Finney would go through a dark night of the soul and would eventually experience physical sensations which he claimed that he could not tolerate any longer. The process of transfiguration, the death to the person he was would only end in the morning.

By comparing the experience to the reified symbol of beginning: ‘baptism’, the sensations become immediately contextualized as a new beginning to a new life. The act therefore divides his life to before and after and is reflected in the imagery of sunrise:

When I awoke in the morning the sun had risen, and was pouring clear light into my room. Words cannot describe the impression that this sunlight made upon me. Instantly, the baptism I had received the night before returned upon me in the same manner.¹⁰⁹

The previous Charles Finney has died, and the new Finney was born. The new life as a preacher substituted for the old one as a lawyer. The element of transfiguration serves as the turning point after which the night gives in to the new day, suffering is replaced with immense love, the confusion is replaced with assurance and Truthfulness. Going through night and day, death and rebirth—the new life substitutes for the old one.

Summary

In conclusion, Charles G. Finney’s awakening is a typical case of evangelical transformation that is in line with a long lineage of awakening narratives starting with St. Paul, St. Augustine and other conversion stories from the Great and the Second Awakening. The influence is recognized by Finney, himself, and is reflected, severally, in

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 25.

the structure of the conversion, the use of Christian terminology, and the hermeneutic influences. Finney's conversion is experienced and structured after the format of an inner battle of two opposing forces, which culminate in a dramatic transfiguration in a response to a personal call. The timing in which the process of reflection begins (a Sabbath night), the urge to repent and the difficulty to do so, as well as the desire for isolation in the grove of woods—all follow the format of Christian and, more particularly, an Evangelical conversion at that time. The typical process of conversion and the appropriate terminology used (the typically Christian terms of death and baptism) raise a question regarding the connection between expression and experience. While Katz claims that a rhetorical tradition shapes a particular experience, others might claim that a familiar experience is interpreted through the rhetorical context informing it.

Finney's conversion is modeled after the previous case studies explored in this chapter in a few other more subtle ways. To begin with, Finney's inner struggle is a reflection of a cosmic battle between dual forces. Within this metaphysics, text, human, night, darkness, and sin are opposed to light, morning, and the divine. We have recognized that this metaphysics is based on an allegorical form of thinking and the principal of displacement. In Finney we can see these familiar elements at use (battling forces, displacement of the old life with the new) but the model is taken at face value and is accepted as a given, as an underlying cause rather than as a conclusion to be drawn from the experience.

The rupture between the elements reaches its culminating point and is resolved through the mediation of Jesus. Through him, the opposites are resolved as a new set of

terms substitute for the previous ones. While Jesus and the experience when meeting him are figuratively described through visual imagery and focus on physical alteration, everything about that experience resists signification and is constructed as *beyond* the normal order of this world.

The ineffable nature of the divine and the experience are taken at face value and are addressed more directly. The construction of ineffability is therefore not as clear as in the previous cases and is presented as a condition, as a problem that the narrator must address in his writings. The limitation of words is thus addressed and overcome through the very acknowledgment that the divine element of the experience cannot be described in words and claims for ineffability therefore serve as an adjective. The contrast between the suffering and joy, noise and silence, the old and new life—also serve to extenuate the magnitude of the experience, thereby addressing its transcendental nature. The entire experience of conversion is not only contrasted with words, but it supersedes them all together.

Thomas Merton

While Finney presented us with a classic case of evangelical conversion during the Second Awakening; Merton presents us with a more contemporary conversion to Catholicism, as well as a prelude to what I identify as a movement towards ‘global religion.’ Originally published in 1948, Thomas Merton’s autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* has immediately become a world’s best-seller and is in print to date. The conversion story of the educated Columbia graduate who has become a Trappist

monk captivated the hearts and evoked the curiosity of millions. In the years following the original publication of his autobiography, Merton published over seventy books mostly on spirituality and religion. He was a poet, social activist and key figure in promoting religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue. Merton met with renowned Buddhist teachers and writers - including His Holiness, the Dalai Lama; the Japanese writer on Zen, D.T. Suzuki and the renowned Vietnamese monk and social activist, Thich Nhat Han.¹¹⁰ Merton not only met with leaders of different religions but also wrote about Eastern texts, advocating their importance to Christianity. As such, Thomas Merton's life and influences represent more than a typical conversion into Catholicism but a movement towards a practice and rhetoric that are inspired by different religions. Thomas Merton was the subject of several biographies but this section will focus on his report of his own awakening. As in the previous section, I begin my analysis by describing the process of Thomas Merton's conversion and only then analyze his rhetorical moves.

The Process

“On the last day of January 1915, under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of a great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders of Spain, I came into the world¹¹¹”—with this famous line, begins Thomas Merton's autobiography. Like Augustine's and Charles G. Finney's awakenings, *The Seven Storey Mountain* is told from a retrospective gaze that observes one's entire life as leading to conversion and

¹¹⁰ Robert Giroux, "Introduction," in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998).

¹¹¹ Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 3.

a life of faith. However, in Merton's case the awakening is more gradual and does not focus on one dramatic moment of transformation.

The second sentence in the book frames Merton's life as a reflection of the human condition: the inner struggle between love and hate, the pull and push towards God and self realization:

Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God, and yet hating Him; born to love Him, living instead in fear and hopeless self-contradictory hungers.¹¹²

The two sentences frame the pattern of the book: straight description of Merton's life, accompanied by meditative reflection on the conditions informing and shaping it.

Following that sentence, Merton describes the earthly setting of his childhood: his parents who "were in the world and not of it – not because they were saints, but because they were artists;"¹¹³ he describes his childhood in Europe and in the US; his mother's death, his dissatisfaction with his father's new companion; school and his father's illness and death from brain tumor.

The same year of his father's death Merton visits Rome and begins to feel a stronger connection to Christ and Christianity:

And now for the first time in my life I began to find out something of Who this Person was that men called Christ. It was obscure, but it was a true knowledge of Him, in some sense, truer than I knew and truer than I would admit. But it was in Rome that my conception of Christ was formed. It was there I first saw

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Him, Whom I now serve as my God and my King, and Who owns and rules my life.¹¹⁴

The power and quality of Christ and the lineage of Christian Fathers was revealed to him through the mosaics and the pieces of art. It was the image of his dead father that showed him his immense suffering and desire for change:

I was in my room. It was night. The light was on. Suddenly it seemed to me that Father, who has now been dead more than a year, was there with me. The sense of his presence was vivid and as real and as startling as if he had touched my arm or spoken to me. The whole thing passed in a flash, but in that flash, instantly, I was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight into the misery and corruption of my own soul, and I was pierced deeply with a light that made me realize something of the condition I was in and I was filled with horror at what I saw, and my whole being rose up in revolt against what was within me, and my soul desired escape and liberation and freedom from all this with an intensity and an urgency unlike anything I had ever known before.¹¹⁵

As in previous cases presented here, long years of pain culminated to a moment of intense suffering. Conditioned by the visits in churches and through the mediation of his own biological father and Christ (a point on which I will elaborate later in this chapter), Merton becomes aware of his inner struggle. As in Augustine and Finney, the moment of this realization is immediate and is compared to a light that flashes on the immense darkness of his soul. With a deep sense of urgency, Merton begins to cry and prays for the first time in his life:

And now I think for the first time in my whole life I really began to pray—praying not with my lips and with my intellect and imagination, but praying out of the very roots of my life and of my being, and praying to the God I had never known, to reach down towards me out of His darkness and to help me to get free of the thousand terrible things that held my will in their slavery.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Merton interprets this experience as a profound moment of Grace that left him feeling happy and joyful. Had Merton converted and dedicated his life to Church then, his process of awakening would have been almost identical to that of Augustine and Finney. Merton himself expresses regrets for not following through: “If I had only followed it through, my life may have been very different and much less miserable for the years to come.”¹¹⁷ But Merton did not convert there and then and started studying in Columbia University.

Merton describes his life as a college kid, hungry for knowledge and experiences, who is - nevertheless - haunted by a quest for something more meaningful. Some heralding events for his change would be his failed romantic relationships and nervous breakdown.¹¹⁸ The writer’s voice intervenes and once in a while interprets the young Merton’s foolhardy life in light of his current Christian faith. In reference to his experience in Cambridge: “They were only graces in the sense that God in his mercy was permitting me to fly as far as I could from his love but at the same time preparing to confront me.”¹¹⁹ Even his nervous breakdown and physical ailment have deeper meaning in hindsight: “It was a humiliation I had deserved more than I knew. There was more justice in it than I could understand.”¹²⁰ According to this worldview, pain, inner struggle as well exposure to a few interesting classes and the reading of other conversion stories gradually prepared Merton for a deeper change.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 124.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 180.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 136.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 180.

As in Augustine, the reading of other conversion stories serve as heralding events for Merton's own transformation. However, in Merton's case, he reports reading Huxley - who was more interested in Eastern traditions than in Christianity. Huxley had read widely and was intelligent and serious and therefore earned Merton's respect. His belief in the possibility of mystical experience inspired Merton, who would "start ransacking the university library for books on Oriental mysticism."¹²¹ A meeting with a Hindu monk, called Brhamachari, proved to be meaningful to Merton. In spite of the latter's Hindu faith, Brhamachari expressed appreciation for Catholicism and suggested that Merton should read Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ*—books that indeed proved to be influential in his life.

Rather than one powerful moment of tacit realization, Merton's transformation was very gradual.

I began to want to take the necessary means to achieve this union, this peace. I began to desire to dedicate my life to God, to His service. The notion was still vague and obscure, and it was ludicrously impractical in the sense that I was already dreaming of mystical union when I did not even keep the simplest rudiments of the moral law. . . .

But oh, how blind and weak and sick I was, although I thought I saw where I was going, and half understood the way! How deluded we sometimes are by the clear notions we get out of books. They make us think that we really understand things of which we have no practical knowledge at all.¹²²

Conceptual understanding would not be enough. Merton's intellectual knowledge developed through reasoning and exposure to relevant philosophies but the tacit insight had to be gained. After witnessing the church' relevance and experiencing a newly found

¹²¹ Ibid., 204.

¹²² Ibid., 224.

peace, Merton's conviction grew and he began to read more and more Catholic texts. As his urge became stronger and almost took a life of its own, Merton expressed a desire to become Catholic.

The meeting with the priest, to whom he announced his willingness to convert is told with cadence, urgency and an aura of inevitability. The entire chapter is leading to Merton's expression of commitment and willingness to convert.

Suddenly, I could bear it no longer. I put down the book and got into my raincoat, and started down the stairs. I went out into the street, I crossed over, and walked along by the grey wooden fence, towards Broadway, in the light rain. And then everything inside me began to sing- to sing with peace, to sing with strength, and to sing with conviction...¹²³

The growing belief was not enough, the official and verbal expression of commitment and faith was necessary. The walk to the father's house was the journey from confusion to the joy of conviction. Merton meets the priest on his way out and the chapter dramatically ends

with Merton's official request: "Father, I want to become Catholic."

It would take a few months of Catholic classes in which "Christ was slowly revealing himself to me."¹²⁴ The confusion, darkness and sluggishness were slowly dissolving, giving way to 'awakening' and 'salvation' of the spirit

The final result was a great deepening and awakening of my soul, a real increase in spiritual profundity and an advance in faith and love and confidence to whom alone look for salvation from these things. And therefore I all the more desired Baptism.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 237.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 238.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 232.

It is noteworthy, that these moments of faith and confidence are described as ‘real’ and that this experience of truthfulness intensified the desire for the formal act of transformation.

The moment of Baptism is described as a new and meaningful beginning, the emancipation from slavery to freedom:

Baptism was beginning, and a most generous one, on the part of God...It was only in the last days before being liberated from my slavery to death, that I had the grace to feel something of my weakness and helplessness.¹²⁶

The Baptism and confession were incredibly meaningful events for Merton, but they were only the beginning. From that moment on in the book, Merton’s rhetoric becomes remarkably more Catholic. However, Merton still describes his difficulties living the life of faith. More peace and assurance would lead to expression of desire to become a saint and live as a monk. Again, the verbal expression of his semi-unconscious desire is itself transformative and meaningful:

‘Yes, I want to be a priest, with all my heart I want it. If it is Your will, make me a priest—make me a priest.’
When I said them, I realized in some measure what I had done with those last four words, what power I had put into the motion on my behalf, and what a union had been sealed between me and that power by my decision.¹²⁷

The decision, the surrender and the language have the capacity to create reality and with this powerful statement the second part of the book concludes. The last part will describe the manifestation of this will.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 242.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 280.

Universals

One of the most compelling elements in Merton's autobiography is the juxtaposition of detailed descriptions of his private difficulties and struggles and a retrospective voice that frames the story from a Christian perspective. It is the way in which the minute and emotional moments are contextualized within a larger and cosmic framework which provide his personal story a universal relevance. We noticed already, in St. Augustine, the same pattern of detailed deceptions of his emotional life and have observed the focus on universals from the beginning of the Church. The same elements recur also in Merton, but in a more introspective and reflective manner. In the following example, Merton contextualizes his private story within the social and material structure that informed it. However, he then emphasizes that his suffering and transformation are not situated within one particular time and social class only; the more basic elements conditioning it run deep into human psychology and cosmology thereby making his story a universal one:

I was the product of my times, my society and my class. I was something that had been spawned by the selfishness and irresponsibility of the materialistic century in which I lived. However, what I did not see was that my own age and class only had an accidental part to play in this...Underneath it was the same old story of greed and lust and self-love, of the three concupiscence bred in the rich, rotted undergrowth of what is technically called "the world," in every age, in every class.¹²⁸

Vivid descriptions of the details informing Merton's conversion enable others to identify with him, the focus on the universal nature of 'greed and self-love' enable the readers to develop hope that they too, could change.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 147.

Signs

I have mentioned several times that similarly to *The Confessions of St. Augustine* and Richard Finney's conversion. *The Seven Storey Mountain* was written at hindsight. Descriptions of the past occurrences given in present form are accompanied by the voice of the more centered and religious Thomas Merton. By describing some of his painful experiences as necessary stages for the fruition of transformation that would allow his persona to shine forth, and by using signs—Merton frames his transformation as inevitable. One particular sign that hints at his future leap of faith into the abyss and conversion was his nervous breakdown. In a language that mimics that of other conversion stories, Merton is called to throw himself out of a big window and into the abyss:

That window! It was huge. It seemed to go right down to the floor. Maybe the force of gravity would draw the whole bed, with me on it, to the edge of the abyss, and spill me headlong into the emptiness.
And far, far away in my mind was a little, dry, mocking voice that said: 'What if you threw yourself out of that window...' ¹²⁹

Merton never knew what was behind this incident and attributed it to a nervous breakdown. The story, however, reveals the inner struggle and pain as well as hints at the ultimate metaphorical death and transformation he would later undergo. The crisis was accompanied by physical ailment and a sense of humiliation; yet, in hindsight, Merton believed he deserved it.¹³⁰ That was an important part of his deep change and release of

¹²⁹Ibid., 179.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 180.

the ego, as his previous conception of himself had to change: “such was the death of the hero, the great man I had wanted to be.”¹³¹

There is always a delicate tension in Merton between his belief in the ability to choose and the determinism of life. However, recognizing this tension in his work, Merton always attributes his transformation to divine grace and ultimately frames the different stages of his life as leading to the inevitable and radical change:

it is easy to say after it all, that God had probably foreseen my infidelities and had never given me the grace in those days because he saw how I would waste and despise it: and perhaps that rejection would have been my ruin. For there is no doubt that one of the reasons why grace was not given to souls is because they to hardened their wills in greed and cruelty and selfishness that their refusal of it would only harden them more...But now I had been beaten into the semblance of some kind of humility by misery and confusion and perplexity and secret, interior fear, and my ploughed soul was better ground for the reception of good seed.¹³²

All the events of Merton’s life: the difficult childhood, the moments of revelation and even the second World War are described as ultimately contributing factors to his change: “all the uncertainties and confusions and fears that followed necessarily from that, and all the rest of the violence and injustice that were in the world had a very important part to play.”¹³³

In describing his pain and transformation, Merton, like other Christian writers, chose metaphors of war, death, and the abyss, thus anticipating the ultimate change that was about to happen. The metaphor of death, hints at the radical alterity Merton experienced already at an earlier age and serves as a sign for the more substantial death

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 230.

¹³³ Ibid., 195.

he would undergo with his conversion to Catholicism and priesthood life. The new stage of life, the rebirth is described in the metaphor of a fertile ground that is ready to be seeded by the divine good, and figuratively symbolized through the institutional practice of baptism, an extremely meaningful event in Merton's life and conversion.

Duality and Mediation

The Seven Story Mountain is characterized by a dualistic frame of think similarly to the one we have observed in the previous case studies analyzed in this chapter. Throughout the book Merton identifies his prior confusion with blindness, darkness, suffering, imperfection and delusional thinking and contrasts it with his later clarity, the real, love and divine perfection. Merton recognizes, in hindsight, his previous blindness and delusional thinking and contrasts it with the deeper and richer truths he would later glimpse. Even the World War functions an allegory to man's inner struggle and basic sin. However, it is important that while the younger Merton was aligned with the side of confusion and sin, he was always tormented by his desire for the other side of the equation, being haunted by a need for transcendence and a more profound perfection than the one he experienced in his daily life.

Like a blind man, Merton could not even see the destitution of his condition: "I was not even a catechumen, but only a blind and deaf and dumb pagan as weak and dirty as anything that ever came out of the darkness of the Imperial Rome."¹³⁴ The duality between human imperfection and divine perfection is clearly established: "He created

¹³⁴ Ibid., 230.

man with a soul that was not made to bring itself to perfection in its own order, but to be perfected by Him in an order infinitely beyond the reach of human power.¹³⁵

While suffering was the result of the human sin and the turning away from God, awareness of this condition was the result of enlightened grace:

For in my greatest misery He would shed, into my soul, enough light to see how miserable I was, and to admit that it was my own fault and my own work. And always I was to be punished from sins by my sins themselves, and to realize, at least obscurely, that I was being so punished and burn in the flames of my own hell, and rote in the hell of my own corrupt will until I was forced at last, by my own intense misery, to give up my own will.¹³⁶

Merton equates the soul to a crystal and uses the metaphor of light versus darkness to establish the impossibility of human perfection in this world without divine intervention:

The soul of man, left to its own natural level, is a potentially lucid crystal left in darkness. It is perfect in its own nature, but it lacks something that it can only receive from outside and above itself. But when the light shines in it, it becomes in a manner transformed into light and seems to lose its nature in the splendor of a higher nature, the nature of the light that is in it.¹³⁷

In the clear duality Merton constructs between all that is human, blind, dark and sinful the possibility to transform towards light and peace can happen only through the mediation of God, or Jesus.

Consider how in spite of centuries of sin and greed and lust and cruelty and hatred and avarice and oppression and injustice, spawned and bred by the free wills of men and women who overcome evil with good, hatred with love, greed with charity, lust and cruelty with sanctity. How could all this be possible without the merciful love of God, pouring out His grace upon us? Can there be any doubt where wars come from and where peace comes from...¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid., 185.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 186.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 142.

The suffering becomes the purging means through which love or grace are met and dualities are transcended: “This free gift is “sanctifying grace.” It perfects our nature with the gift of life, an intellection, a love, a mode of existence infinitely above its own level.”¹³⁹

It is essential that the gift of grace and the bridging of dualities are achieved only through mediation. In Merton, the first mediating presence is that of his father, a sign to a meeting with the divine Father later on.

Suddenly it seemed to me that Father who has been dead more than a year was there with me. The sense of his presence was vivid and as real and as startling as if he had touched my arm or spoken to me. The whole thing passed in a flash, but in that flash, instantly, I was overwhelmed with a sudden and profound insight into the misery and corruption of my own soul.¹⁴⁰

The haunting figure of his father is constructed as the means to experience the deep suffering and pain which paves way to the more profound light:

strangely enough, it was onto his big factory of campus that the Holy Ghost was waiting to show me the light, in his own light. And some of the chief means He used, and through which he operated, was human friendship.¹⁴¹

It would later be the mediating figure of Jesus that would serve as the corporal figure through which the dualities are transcended. Merton quotes Apoc I when describing his understanding of Jesus: “For in him dwellth the fullness of the Godhead corporally, and you are filled in Him, Who is the Head of all principality and powers.” The materialization of the divine God, Jesus offers the mediation of the inexplicable grace and acceptance.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 123.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 194.

The rhetoric of awakening in Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* is thus in accordance with the metaphysics of dualities we have observed earlier. The allegorical thinking distinguishes between war and peace, suffering and love, delusion and blindness versus reality. Other familiar metaphors Merton uses are that of 'gift', 'light' and darkness, as well as death and rebirth. The dualities are not tolerated and Merton expresses poetic nostalgia for all that is good, as the light and peace are constructed as beyond the natural order of the human world. It is therefore essential that transformation and the bridging of these dualities can be accomplished only through divine grace through the mediation of the Merton's biological father, his spiritual 'father' and ultimately the divine father and Jesus.

Nonduality

In later books Merton will adopt a more nondual approach to spirituality that would be reflected in his writings in numerous ways. His book *The Inner Experience*¹⁴² was written in 1959, some ten years after *The Seven Storey Mountain* was published. In it, Merton distinguishes his insights from the ones he expressed earlier in his life. Merton explains that the previous book *What is Contemplation?* - which Merton chose to revise - was preliminary and superficial. He explains "now that I am a little less perfect, I seem to have a saner perspective."¹⁴³

This last and humble declaration already signals a marked difference from the quest and belief in perfection he expresses in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. As the desire

¹⁴² Thomas Merton and William Henry Shannon, *The Inner Experience : Notes on Contemplation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, viii.

for divine perfection was a part of the dual metaphysics that characterized the earlier part of his life, it is appropriate that this short sentence signifies a larger movement from a dual to a more nondual rhetoric. This shift is evident already in the introduction which warns the readers that the book contains no new information and that contemplative practice does not necessarily yield any results. Merton does not dismiss the importance of contemplation, but he begins to associate it not with a realm distinct from man's life, but an integral part of it.

In expressing his new worldview, Merton makes a few rhetorical moves. The first, and perhaps most significant one, is adopting the rhetoric of Eastern tradition and especially that of Zen. To begin with, he reverts to Zen's nondual language and encourages the readers to 'recover their basic unity', this is similar as we will see to Zen's 'original self' at the same time as it still maintains duality by emphasizing the element of unity as a merging of two—contemplation and ordinary life. Merton also directly quotes the example of Zen and their 'rhetoric of suchness' as it is reflected in a Chinese poem. Merton recognizes that the poem might perplex the readers. He also acknowledges the difference between the Zen use of playful paradoxes and focus on the present experience, which differs from the 'amorous mysticism' so characteristic to Christianity. However, Merton emphasizes the similarities between the traditions and refers to *The Cloud of Unknowing* and other 'apophatic texts' as examples to texts that maintain the ineffable nature of the experience. He equates emptiness stillness that 'is not dead but is filled with infinite possibilities.' It is, he emphasizes, entering 'the cloud of knowing.'

After translation of the satori experience to Christian rhetoric, Merton reverts to a more exclusively Christian approach. Here he cites classical texts by Augustine and explains that what Zen calls 'self' is "God" in Christianity and emphasizes the unity the mystic experiences between God and the self. Other metaphors such as "ground" or spiritual "rock" and are described through negative language characteristic of Eastern mysticism: the rock is both transparent and full of light, hard and soft. Merton then refers to John of the Cross and translates the latter's discussion of faith to acceptance of Jesus. He emphasizes that, during the "dark night," one must be guided by faith that transcends all human desires into the divine God.

It can thus be seen that later in his life, Augustine moved to a less dual view of reality and contemplative life that is reflected in his adoption of Zen rhetoric, return to the world, and emphasis on the original unity of reality. However, his writings still maintain a dual perspective: he distinguishes between the self and God, darkness and light, the inner and outer self. Moreover, by emphasizing the importance of unity and transcendence, he still maintains a dual perspective. Importantly, Merton translates Eastern texts to the apophatic language of Christian texts. By reading Zen rhetoric in the spirit of Christian mysticism, Merton, in fact, reverts to an allegorical mode of thinking (in which one sign system substitutes for another) and emphasizes the universal nature of experience—a rhetorical move characteristic of Christian rhetoric.

Ineffability

A few explanations can be offered to the absence of direct expressions of ineffability in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. To begin with, Merton's autobiography does

not focus on his contemplative experiences. We have already seen that the most difficult experiences to describe are the most physical ones and in spite of Merton's moments of peace, joy or pain and turmoil, he did not describe in his *autobiography* physical transformation similar to the one experienced by Finney. The absence of claims for ineffability might be also be attributed to Merton's rich linguistic skills as a poet.

However, in this book and in later writings we can see Merton's acknowledgment of his own inclination for writing at the same time that he acknowledges the limitation of language. In a manner recalling that of Augustine's, Merton describes how the struggle to conceptually understand God drove him away from actually experiencing him:

The truth is, that the concept of God which I had always entertained, and which I had accused Christians of teaching to the world, was a concept of a being who was simply impossible. He was infinite and yet finite; perfect and imperfect; eternal and yet changing—subject to all the variations of emotion, love, sorrow, hate, revenge that, men are prey to. How could this fatuous, emotional thing be without beginning and without end, the creator of all? I had taken the dead letter of Scripture at its very deadeast, and it had killed me, according to the saying of St. Paul” “The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life....¹⁴⁴

Merton rejects literal descriptions of God as a being and advocates for a more figurative and transcendental understanding of Him, as perfection beyond all that is human and limited in our world.

I know that many people call themselves. “atheists” not because they are repelled and offended by statements about God made in imaginary and metaphorical terms which they are not able to interpret and comprehend. They refuse these concepts of God, not because they despise God, but perhaps because they demand a notion of Him more perfect than they generally find: and because ordinary, figurative concepts of God could not satisfy them, they turn away and think that there are no other: or worse still, they refuse to listen to philosophy, on the ground that it is

¹⁴⁴ Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 191.

nothing but a web of meaningless words spin together for the justification of the same old hopeless falsehood.¹⁴⁵

As in previous cases, Jesus appears as the figurative embodiment of that which defies textuality:

It was the Christ of the Apocalypse, the Christ of the martyrs, the Christ of the Fathers. It is the Christ of St. John, and of St. Paul, and of St. Augustine and St. Jerome and all the Fathers—and of the Desert Fathers. It is Christ God, Christ King, *‘for in Him dwellth the fullness of the Godhead corporally, and you are filled in Him, Who is the Head of all principality and power...’* The saints of those forgotten days had left upon the walls of their churches words by which the peculiar grace of God I was able in some measure to apprehend. Although I could not decode them all...¹⁴⁶

In his later writings, Merton addresses more directly the nature of the ineffable experience. We can see there an interesting move towards a more nondual rhetoric that is beyond words at the same time as Merton maintains an ontological understanding of divinity and language.

In a later article, Merton discusses the importance of Eastern texts and refers to the ineffable nature of ‘realization.’ He cites relevant passages from the Tao Te Ching:

Tao can be talked about but not the eternal Tao,
Names can be named but not the Eternal name.
As the origin of Heaven and earth is nameless”
As “the mother” of all things it is nameable.

Merton focuses on the ineffable nature of the Tao and its experiential nature: “the whole secret of life lies in the discovery of this Tao which can never be discovered. This does not involve an intellectual quest, but rather a spiritual change of one’s whole being. ...”

Merton adopts negative language, and paradoxes so typical of Eastern texts: “it is the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 120-21.

formless form, the imageless image. It is a “fountain spirit” of inexhaustible life and yet it never draws attentions to itself... It is utterly elusive: if you think you have seen it, what you have seen is not the Tao. Yet it is the source of all, and all things return to it “as to their home.”¹⁴⁷

Yet again, Merton reads the Eastern ineffability from a Christian framework. While he acknowledges Eastern texts nondual approach and their focus on the experiential rather than the linguistic level, Merton takes them to refer what he identifies as ‘supernatural’, that which is beyond the normal order to life and textuality: “the values hidden in Oriental thought actually reveal themselves only on the plane of spiritual experience. They belong, of course, to the natural order: but they certainly have deep affinities with supernatural wisdom itself.”¹⁴⁸

In other cases, Merton translated the perplexing statements from the Tao to Christian terminology through focus of union or and the metaphor of love:

The power of the sage is then the very power which has been revealed in the Gospels as Pure Love,. *Deus caritas est* is the full manifestation of the truth hidden in the nameless Tao, and yet it still leaves Tao nameless. For Love is not a name, any more than Tao is. One must go beyond the word and enter into communion with the reality before he can know anything about it; and then, more like than not, he will know “in the cloud of unknowing”¹⁴⁹.

In other cases, Merton translates the ineffable nature of the experience through the use of Christian terms such as mystery, love and divine mercy:

All life tends to grow like this, in mystery inscaped with paradox and contradiction, yet centered, in its very heart, on the divine mercy. Such is my

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, Rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.,: Image Books, 1974), 296.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

philosophy, and it is more than philosophy – because it consists not in statements about a truth that cannot adequately be stated, but in grace, mercy. And the realization of the “new life” that is in us who believe, by the gift of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁰

The references themselves help contextualize his discussions within the framework of ineffability. The language of love is very important in both the Christian and the Judaic tradition, for various reasons.¹⁵¹ It is important, however, that non-specific terms such as ‘love’ and ‘mystery’ and ‘grace’ can be open to multiple interpretations and are, therefore, especially suitable for discussing non conceptual realization.

Other than the use of non specified terms, the metaphor of love, claims for ineffability, negative language and paradoxes, Merton makes significant use of another trope, most significant in Christianity –emphasis on silence. It is perhaps not surprising that as a Trappist monk, who spends most of his time in silent contemplation, Merton would dedicate whole sections in his later writings for that subject matter. In one chapter, silence is constructed in opposition to the noise of senseless chatter, as the divine speech and the means to communion with God.

But when the Lord comes as a Brigidoom there remains nothing to be said except that He is coming, and that we must go out to meet Him. *Ecce Spnsus venit! Exie obviam eil!*

After that we go forth to find Him in solitude. There we communicate with him alone, without words, without discursive thoughts, in the silence of our whole being.

When what we say is meant for no one else but Him, it can hardly be said in language. What is not meant to be related is not even experienced on a level that can be clearly analyzed. We know that it must not be told, because it cannot.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹⁵¹ For a detailed analysis of the ‘language of love’ see: McGinn, "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism."

But before we come to that which is unspeakable and unthinkable, the spirit hovers on the frontiers of language, wondering whether or not to stay on its own side of the border, in order to have something to bring back to her. This is the test of those who wish to cross the frontier. If they are not ready to leave their own ideas and their own words behind them, they cannot travel further.

In this segment, Merton makes use of the spaces between the lines to evoke a silent contemplation in the readers. He acknowledges the ineffable nature of divinity and uses the language of love and the structure of ‘myth’; he emphasizes silence as the means for achieving the desired union.

The clear distinction between God’s word and the human word, and the importance of silence for experiential unity with the divine is repeated in other places:

THE SILENCE of the tongue and of the imagination dissolves the barrier between ourselves and the peace of things that exist only for God and not for themselves. But the silence of all inordinate desire dissolves the barrier between ourselves and God. Then we come to live in Him alone. Then mute beings no longer speak to us merely with their own silence. It is the lord Who speaks to us merely with their own silence. It is the Lord Who speaks to us, with a far deeper silence, hidden in the midst of our own selves.¹⁵²

Again, the mediation between divinity, silence, and immortality to speech and the ephemeral life is through the figure of Christ:

Life and death, words and silence, are given us because of Christ. In Christ we die to the flesh and live to the spirit. IN Him we die to illusion and live to truth. We speak to confess Him, and we are silent in order to meditate on Him and enter deeper into His silence, which is at once the silence of death and of eternal life—the silence o Good Friday night and the peace of Easter morning.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, 458.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 459.

Throughout the chapter, Merton distinguishes between the spirit and body that are associated with mortality and speech, to silence that which is associated with spiritual beings. It is only through silence that man can enter immortal life.

In summary, although Merton does not refer to ineffability directly, in his autobiography, he writes at length about the topic later in his life. In general, Merton acknowledges the importance of speech but emphasizes the experiential nature of divine experience that is for him *beyond* and the natural order of reality. Even when using nondual texts of Eastern traditions, Merton emphasizes that mystical realization supersedes speech and life. Merton discusses ineffability through the familiar terminology of love and mercy, negative language, the structure of myth, reference to familiar apophatic texts, emphasis on silence, and through the use of spaces and gaps for creating an experience of silence in the readers. His description of silence belongs to a dual framework, as silence is associated with divinity, peace, and infinity and contrasted to mortal speech, egotism and suffering in this world. That dual approach would be refined in his later and less dual books.

Chapter Summary

The story of Jesus' resurrection, and others conversion stories modeled after him, has rhetorical significance—it often serves as evidence for the validity of the faith and the viability of the teachings. Awakening of individuals in Christianity is modeled after that of Jesus, in a few important ways that were identified in this chapter. To begin with, the process of conversion comes to fruition through inner struggle that is characterized by

immense suffering. The inner struggle culminates in a threshold experience, after which one is transfigured. The emulation of Jesus is especially evident in the process of suffering, which paves the way to a personal meeting with Christ, 'The Lover.' Suffering and of love are thus necessary and complementary elements in the process of conversion in Christianity. Another important aspect that was identified in the conversion stories analyzed is the attention given to the emotional landscape of the narrator and the fact that it is written in first person. However, in spite of the focus on individuality, the conversion is presented as a universal solution to a universal problem and the actual change is believed to have happened only thanks to God's grace. The actual transformation is not only mental or spiritual but, importantly, it is also physical. The figure of the narrator is transformed and as in the case of Jesus' allowing his *persona* to 'shine' forth.

Transfiguration can appear as a spontaneous process or it can come about through the use of institutional practices (i.e., baptism, change of clothes). In any case, transfiguration signals the dramatic change from the previous life to the new one.

An important characteristic of awakening in Christianity is its ineffable nature. The tight relation between language and resurrection can be attributed to the mimetic understanding of language in Christianity and the ways in which the figure of Jesus was used to mediate the schism between words and things, divinity and textuality. Christianity inherited from the Greeks the representative model of language and the particular understanding of 'word' as an arbitrary sign which represent a thing outside the text. Consequently, language was understood to be moving from a thing to a word and was measured against an external source for its 'correct' meaning. In this model,

ambiguity is not considered an opportunity for the play of multiple meanings and differences are not tolerated. To bridge the different worldviews of the Greek tradition which saw divinity as a wordless vision of a divine being, and the Jewish tradition which understood divinity to be a continuous interpretation of the texts, Paul had to adopt a rhetorical figure that would be accepted for both traditions. Allegory and typology have thus been adopted by him and have since become the central method of Christian and Western hermeneutic.

Allegory enabled Paul to distinguish between what was now divided to ‘literal’ reading of the Scriptures and the Spiritual reading of the scriptures. The division was hierarchical with the spiritual meaning considered superior to the crude literal one. Through the use of allegory—reading one sign system in terms of another—the now ‘Old Testament’ was read ‘spiritually.’ Augustine would further develop the basic distinction, equating the literal with death, and the spiritual with life. Through the use of ‘predictive midrash’, the Old Testament was now read as predicting the coming of Jesus. It was the same movement from mimesis towards the real which characterized the Socratic turn. Consequently, the Old Testament was reduced to mere shadows of the New Testament; the Old Testament was now read as merely announcing the real substance that is Jesus. Later conversion narratives would follow a similar format—they would be written in hindsight and would contain the ‘signs’ in the Augustinian sense of the word: events in their lives were constructed as predicting the inevitable conversion of the writer. The narrators’ previous lives was according to this reading deluded with its only goal being the way in which the suffering and delusion have ultimately led the writer to the

important event of conversion. The new life in Christ was conversely read as the real and bright one.

An entire metaphysics was formed on the basis of this allegorical thinking. Words were now associated with the body and all that is human, illusionary, ephemeral, dark, and crude. Divinity on the other hand, was associated with ‘spiritual reading, Truthfulness, eternity, and silence. One implication of that was an escape from textuality. Since texts were associated with temporality, humanity, darkness and the original sin, the desired movement was to go beyond them towards the divine silence. The crucial movement, according to Augustine’s sign system, was from a thing to a sign to a divine silence. Since silence was now understood to be a sign, pointing to God’s word, silence and experience were considered superior of all. Augustine’s theory according to which things are superior to auditory signs that are in turn superior to written signs has therefore shaped the logocentric fallacy that is so central to Western thought.

The problem of ineffability arises in Christianity due to the dual nature of the allegorical system and the attempt to transcend the inferior and human order of signification. Since words belong to the limited order of signification - and since a desire for transcendence of the human order and preference for ‘union with God’ is essential in this system—ineffability is constructed as all that is *beyond* human and sinful. However, due to the mimetic nature of language - and its preference for identities over the play of differences, gerunds, and conditions typical of Jewish thought—ineffability and silence, themselves, become ontological. Silence is constructed in visual and spatial imagery and is constructed with the linear understanding of words. While text belongs to the temporal

and mortal, silence is associated with infinity. Similarly, references to ineffability carry the notion that they refer to some transcendental signifier somewhere outside the text. This is, again, Derrida's fundamental critique of Western thought.

Jesus appears in the scene as the mediator of these otherwise unabridged differences. Instead of textual mediation or tolerance for differences, the figure of Jesus becomes the ultimate mediator. The resurrected Jesus, as we have already observed, is beyond the order of signification all together: 'The Word made Flesh.' When future Christians would experience the same struggle between the dual forces of darkness and light, sin and mercy, temporality and infinity, words and silence—their personal struggle would be similarly resolved through the cosmic mediation of Jesus, and/or their own transfiguration as modeled after him. In both cases, the awakening experience is associated with ineffability, and it is this act that resolves the personal and metaphysical differences, which cannot otherwise be bridged or tolerated.

The element of replacement is also essential to Christian rhetoric. Thanks to the allegorical reading and the quest for perfection and a correct reading of the text, the New Testament has come to replace the Old and erroneous Testament. Awakening stories are also characterized by the same move as the threshold experience divides their lives to before and after, dark night and an illuminated morning. In retrospect gaze, however, their previous lives are read as ultimately leading to the inevitable conversion. A tension between the belief in choice to determinism often exists in the conversion stories read, especially those of Charles, G. Finney and Thomas Merton. However, the retrospect gaze tends to interpret the old life in terms of the new one, therefore framing the change as an

inevitable consequence. Suffering is thus read as a necessary means for purging the soul and preparing it for transformation, the meeting with Jesus and the experience of love.

The hierarchical order of readings and the fusion of dualities into union through the mediation of Jesus have shaped a theory that is focused on universals. This pattern has deep consequences that go behind the belief that Jesus is the universal and ultimate Messiah. Years after St. Paul, Thomas Merton would advocate for openness to Eastern religions. However, his method of justifying the significance of these traditions would, to a large extent, depend on this allegorical thinking as he read Zen in terms of Christianity. Importantly, he would emphasize the universal nature of the traditions when explaining their relevance.

The metaphysical system described above has come to be taken for granted. As often happens, the ways in which allegory, typology and the very understanding of language have shaped the dual worldview and conceptions of Jesus have been neutralized. Consequently, ineffability has gradually come to assume an un-debatable status that is associated with divinity. However, ineffability as it is understood in this system is the direct result of this rhetorical construction of the Christian worldview. For this reason, more recent cases have emphasized the ineffable nature of the tacit and contemplative experiences. A more minute observation of these experiences will reveal that, as Varela showed, the experiences are probably not beyond language, but they are so grounded in affect that they precede language. In any case, claims for ineffability have become ubiquitous. These claims functioned not necessarily as a disclaimer but as an adjective emphasizing the uniqueness of the event and its tacit nature. As was hinted, the

claims for ineffability were also mainly used to distinguish the experience from its normal order and create a sense of transcendence. This rhetorical move has in turn supported the allegorical worldview which originally created the need for transcendence.

Other ways in which ineffability was constructed, and the ways in which the problem of ineffability was solved, was through the use of silence. Direct reference and praise of the divine silence and the construction of silent experience, through the use of calculated spaces, have served the writers to contrast with the ‘clamor’ of words, and to construct a gap - a pose for the readers. Other techniques used were a mythical structure, as well as paradoxes and negative language. Although these last examples are more typical of Eastern traditions, they were used to some extent also in Christianity and the conversion stories read—especially that of Thomas Merton. In the examples studied in this chapter, paradoxes were constructed through the use of familiar and sensual concepts that were exceeded in an irrational way. Rather than specific imagery, Christian mysticism prefers the use of abstractions such as ‘love’ and ‘divine mercy,’ thereby using an ambiguous terminology to address the simultaneous need for a referent and the need to maintain a sense of ineffability and ontological transcendence.

Thomas Merton made a heavier use of negative language characteristic of Eastern religions. He also tended to cite from famous apophatic texts, and transitioned to a more nondual rhetoric later in his life. Although Merton’s writings maintained their dual thrust - due to the basic distinctions between God and man, the interior and the exterior self - his rhetoric becomes less dual as he emphasizes return to the world and relinquishing of the quest for perfection. His writings become more intertextual and rich with references

to psychology and other (especially Eastern) systems of thought. As such, I believe that he represents a movement towards what I call 'a global religion'—that is, a spiritual 'movement' - both intertextual and open for different influences, even as it retains preference for one spiritual system over another.

CHAPTER 5: THERE IS NOTHING BUT *THAT*- SATORI AND THE RHETORIC OF ZEN

Zen emerged in first-century China as a new form of Buddhist practice based on the teachings of “Sudden awakening” and was migrated to Japan in the seventh-eight century where it became intertwined with Japanese culture.¹ Zen is often perceived to be anti rhetorical due to its neglect of the sutras and avoidance of discourse on abstract topics. The Buddha lived for forty-five years after his enlightenment and left extensive oral teachings that were later recorded in the Pali Canon, a collection measuring approximately eleven times the length of the Bible.

In spite of the immense breadth and depth of these teachings, they offer no direct explanation of their central aim, *nirvana*. Instead, some of the texts qualify what nirvana is not, others praise it, and the vast majority focus on tools for experiencing it. Consequently, Zen emphasizes direct experience and silent meditation (*zazen*.) One of the unique things about Zen is the new art of discourse it developed: Zen rhetoric is meant to merge the absolute and relative levels of reality in intriguing statements such as “samsara is nirvana” (*delusion is awakening*) and to bring about sudden awakening through the very use of words.²

As in former chapters, the current one will look at the ways in which awakening is rhetorically constructed and examine the ways in which the rhetoric of Zen informs the awakening reports of individuals. The chapter begins with an overview of awakening in

¹ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Bollingen Series ; 64. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

² Bernard Faure, "Fair and Unfair Language Games in Chan/Zen," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 158.

Zen and is followed by a summary of Zen rhetoric, particularly Zen kōans and the master Dōgen 's view of signification and expression. Finally, the reader will find an analysis of nine testimonies of awakening, published in *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau.³

Satori

According to the legend of Shakayamuni's birth: when the Buddha was born, he took three steps forward, pointed to heaven with one hand and to the earth with the other, and he said, "Between heaven and earth I alone am the honored one."⁴ In Zen, this pivotal moment is studied as a kōan: not as a riddle meant to be solved, but rather as a catalyst to create a transformative moment for those hearing it. This pivotal moment, known as *satori*, is at the heart of Zen practice.

Satori is referred to in Zen writings as "the realization of the original mind". Master Keizan describes it as "the universal ground of consciousness, concealed beneath the temporal conditioning that forces people to experience life through outlooks arbitrarily limited by their cultural, social, and personal histories".⁵ In Buddhist terms, the habitually distorted perspective through which one mistakes one's limited cognitive schema for reality is referred to as *samasara*, or *delusion*. When satori results in the dropping away of these forms, one can see reality for what it is: a pure and nondual awareness of the empty nature of all things (referred to as *thatness* or *suchness*⁶.) John

³ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*.

⁴ John Daido Looi, *Sitting with Koans : Essential Writings on Zen Koan Introspection*, 1st ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 1.

⁵ Master Keizan, *Transmission of Light*, trans. Cleary Thomas (San Francisco: North Press, 1990), ix.

⁶ Welwood, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening : Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation*, ix, Keizan, *Transmission of Light*.

Welwood further explains, “When this kind of knowing is directed inwardly, it becomes what is called in Zen: ‘directly seeing into one’s own nature.’ In this case, one’s own nature is not an object of thought, observation or reflection.”⁷

An experience of Satori is not to be viewed as the end of one’s practice but rather the beginning of true understanding. Those who are satisfied with this experience and stop there are considered to have ‘gained a little and considered it enough.’⁸ Another Zen proverb addresses this tendency by stating, “the level ground is littered with skulls; the experts are those who pass through the forest of thorns.”⁹ Awakening is thus a gradual process that is marked by meaningful moments of realization. The awakened mind is often analogically described as an Ox and the different levels of enlightenment are portrayed as stages of finding, taming, and shifting in relationship to that Ox in a famous series of images and poetry depicting the spiritual path. These stages are summarized as follows: seeking the ox; to finding the tracks; having a first glimpse of the ox; catching the ox; taming the ox; riding the ox home; ox forgotten, self alone; both ox and self forgotten; returning to the source; and finally, entering the market place with empty hands.¹⁰ The last stage refers to reintegration in daily life with the deep realization of sunatya or emptiness.

⁷ Welwood, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening : Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation*, 103.

⁸ Thomas Cleary, "Introduction," in *The Transmission of Light* (San Francisco: North Press, 1990), x.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*.

Satori entails then “awareness, insight, consciousness, and self-transformation;”¹¹ it is not the end of one’s practice but the threshold to greater knowledge and freedom. According to the book *Transmission of the Lamp*, which narrates great awakening experiences (not merely satori) in a long lineage of Zen masters, intelligence and great deeds do not suffice. Until one experiences satori he does not escape the prison of the world.¹² “See the playing of the puppets on the stage,” wrote an ancient Zen master, “All along there is someone inside pulling the strings.”¹³ Without satori people are compared to puppets on stage; on awakening, they realize who had been pulling the strings.

One way to refer to awakening and the inability to capture the new understanding is through the performative concept of ‘unknowing.’ The following kōan illustrates this point:

Jizo asked Hogen: Where are you going?
Hogen said, “I am wandering in random.”
Jizo said, “What do you think of wandering?”
Hogen said, “I do not know.”
Jizo said, “Not knowing is most intimate.”
Hogen was suddenly awakened.”¹⁴

Ama Samy explains that not knowing is the very Self that cannot be captured in words and concepts. It is beyond discrimination, analysis and reasoning, subject and object. Another famous kōan asks: “What was your face before your parents were born?” Both kōans interrogate the question: “Who am I?” Any answer that will be given could be followed up by another question: ‘Who is the one who answers?’ So the knowing of the

¹¹ Samy, *Zen Heart Zen Mind- the Teachings of Zen Master Ama Sami*, 154.

¹² Keizan, *Transmission of Light*, xvi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁴ Samy, *Zen Heart Zen Mind- the Teachings of Zen Master Ama Sami*, 152-3.

Self in Zen is constructed through not knowing. This state is often compared to ‘beginner’s mind’ because it is more open to possibilities. Since the realization of emptiness is not conceptual, Zen rhetoric addresses it head on through the concept of unknowing and through the embodiment of this experience through contemplation of the kōans. To avoid construction of subjectivity, which Buddhist thought consider to be fluid and interconnected, Zen uses direct questions and paradoxes which point to the impossibility of establishing origins.

Satori is often described quite dramatically as a shattering experience and through metaphors of death and rebirth. A few commonly used aphorisms include, “Let go over the cliff,” “Die completely and then come back to life – after that no one can deceive you.” Dōgen’s instructions for zazen are: “you should stop the intellectual practice of pursuing words, and learn the stepping back of turning the light around and looking inward. Mind and body will naturally drop off, and the ‘original face’ will appear.”¹⁵ The dropping off of body and mind is the dropping off of the identification with them; it is the death of previous illusions and attachment and the entry into unknowing. Another famous term is “the dragon howl,” which is based on an ancient meditation story. A student asked a Zen master, “Is there a dragon howl in a dead tree?” the master said, “I say there is a lion roar in a skull.” Here the “dead tree” and the skull” recall the great ‘death’ theme of Zen.

The Zen master Dōgen went into great length to distinguish satori from an experience gained by drugs and the Christian ‘bliss.’ ‘Awakening’ too, can be a

¹⁵ Cleary, "Introduction," xiii.

confusing term since it is in the emptiness of satori where the realization arises that there is no independent self who experiences. Master Ama Samy explains:

Emptiness can mean many things: particularly self- emptying, letting go, dying, entering into darkness and un-knowing; the suchness and *isness* of beings. It should not be identified with a condition or a state of mind; it is not a thing, nor the state of unity as against multiplicity. Emptiness is beyond all language and words, and it is at the same time all language and words.¹⁶

Ama Samy uses the familiar metaphor of death to refer to the realization of sunyata.

Describing the experience as ‘beyond words’ or ‘ineffable’ would make sunyata something that exists outside the text, it would be a thing and therefore ontological. A description of that sort would conflict with the very theory of sunyata which highlights language’s tendency to create a false identification with the existence of an independent Self. Master Ama Samy therefore chooses a nondual statement according to which emptiness is both beyond language as it is all language.

Nondual rhetoric is emphasized in other ways, as well. In Zen, both transcendence and reintegration into the ordinary world are considered essential: “if the host does not know there is a guest, there is no way to respond to the world; if a guest does not know there is a host, there is no vision beyond material sense.”¹⁷ Insisting on the interdependence of Zen “death” and renewal, Dōgen goes on to say: “The leaves spread based on the root—this is called the enlightened ones; root and branch must return to the source—this is penetrating study.”¹⁸ In this sense, death is related to renewal; such renewal is a return to the origin that was obscured by shadows (i.e. by conditioned

¹⁶ Samy, *Zen Heart Zen Mind- the Teachings of Zen Master Ama Sami*, 157.

¹⁷ Cleary, "Introduction," xii.

¹⁸ Keizan, *Transmission of Light*, xv.

thinking and delusions). The original mind is untainted: When asked how to achieve thorough penetration, Hongzhi said: “when you are open and clean, undefiled, ‘the clear sky is cloudless, there is no breeze on the autumn waters.’ ”¹⁹ Awakening is thus the unveiling of delusions and false identification with the Self. In this sense, Dōgen would stress, we are all already awakened and yet, we are deluded.

An evocative articulation of Realization in Zen came from Master Weihsin of Ch’ing-yuan Mountain. He said to his disciples: “Thirty years ago before I underwent training, I saw mountains as mountains, and rivers as rivers. After I had called on enlightened persons, I managed to enter Ch’an [Zen] and saw mountains were not mountain and rivers were not rivers. Now that I have stopped [my false thinking], I see mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers.’ And so the most famous lines of realization are these: “Before Enlightenment, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers. During Enlightenment, mountains are not mountains, rivers are not rivers. After Enlightenment, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers.”²⁰ Master Ama Samy explains, in an unawakened state that is based on egocentric delusion, realities are substantial and distinct from one another: I am me, rivers are rivers, mountains are mountains. In the first state of awakening where mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers, one realizes the emptiness of all things including the Ego-Self. There arises the understanding that the previous dualistic view of the world as Subject-Object; I-God, identity and separation was based on separation and projection. In this stage previous

¹⁹ Cleary, "Introduction," xii.

²⁰ Samy, *Zen Heart Zen Mind- the Teachings of Zen Master Ama Sami*, 157.

understanding collapses and one feels as if the ground has been swept from under one's feet. This is the affirmation stated in the beginning of the chapter: 'I alone am the only one.' In the next stage, one realizes that there is no ground even within oneself to stand upon. One understands the ultimate nature of reality which is nothing but what it is: suchness; mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers.

The element of *suchness* in Zen rhetoric, or as I call it 'the rhetoric of suchness' is expressed also in the following tale: When Hogen experienced difficulties in practice and understanding of ultimate reality he said to his masters: "O master! I am now in a situation in which language is reduced to silence and thinking has no way to follow," The master remarked, "if you still are to talk about ultimate reality, see how it is nakedly apparent in everything and every event!" Each and every thing *presents* itself. The presentation of every moment as it is, *suchness* is also the presentation of emptiness.

Similarly, Korean Zen master Seung Sahn talks of three kinds of enlightenment answers. To the question 'What is this?' of an apple, to answer "an apple" can mean that you are caught by a name; to say "not an apple," can mean that you are attached to Emptiness or negation. On the other hand, if you hit the floor or shout "*katz*"²¹ you throw away all names and no-names, it is presenting emptiness and is called the first enlightenment. The next step would be to answer, "the sky is blue, the grass is green, the wall is white, the apple is red." It is 'like this' answer, and this means that things are as they are; it is three times three equals nine. The third and final step is to have a bite of the

²¹ In Zen idiom, the shout 'katz' one has thrown away all ideas and concepts, that one has experienced Emptiness, that one is no more attached to anything.

apple. This is 'just like this answer.' Eating the apple is the performance of enlightenment, there is nothing that can be said. It is the solution to the tension between direct experience to conceptual knowledge and concepts that on the absolute level become irrelevant, yet on the relative level must be used. The rhetoric of suchness therefore essentializes reality and focuses on the presentation of each particular moment in full. Through the use of positive statements when describing particular elements without digressing into other descriptions; each moment receives full attention as a coherent whole that cannot be reduced simply to the signifying logic of language. Through nonsense words such as *katz* and through the use of performative actions, the speakers avoid the trap of ontological descriptions.

In sum, satori is the first stage of awakening. It is often described in images of unknowing, death, rebirth or return to the origin. In spite of the metaphors emphasizing death, letting go, and breaking through, satori is considered a constructive experience, a threshold to greater awareness and freedom from the fetters of the world. For this reason it is described also as rebirth or return to the origin. In awakening, one realizes the empty nature of all things. Things do not have an independent existence and duality is realized as a construction. For this reason, ineffability of consciousness and the rejection of words altogether is not a preferred method for articulating the experience. While no words can describe emptiness, all words can. The rhetoric of Zen therefore resorts to *suchness* and the presentation of everyday moment as they are in and of themselves. Nonsense words, paradoxes, and performative actions are also used to point to the impossibility of origins

and independent identities. In the next section I will elaborate more on the rhetoric of Zen before I move to the actual analysis of testimonies of awakening.

Signification

Awakening according to Zen understanding cannot be talked about-- "the Way is beyond language" as the saying goes. Buddhists fear the tendency of the language to divert the mind from reality and perpetuate delusion. In this perspective, to speak is to lie because language employs nouns and names, which support the false impression that distinct things actually exist.²² In contrast to India's Upanisadic tradition, which emphasizes the identity of self, substance, and transcendental Absolute, the Buddha emphasized that there is no self, that everything without exception arises and passes away according to conditions.²³ The question of God was left "undeclared" deliberately; both God and No-God are empty of own-being. For this reason, Buddhism uses language cautiously to avoid the construction of what is perceived to be illusionary identities. The second chapter demonstrated the impersonal and technical language of the abhidharma and we have seen, in this chapter, the use of nonsense, performance, and paradoxes as means to avoid duality and ontological thinking. Zen teachers have held that, in spite of the challenges of language use and the emphasis on direct experience, The Way must be communicated to all sentient things. In ancient times, Chan masters used paradox and quixotic action, and in later times they used poetic language. One important use of language in Zen that I have briefly mentioned is its kōans.

²² Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Contexts."

²³ Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism," 229.

kōans

The term kōan means, literally, “public case,” and was originally used to refer to public documents posted for all to view. The perplexing statements or interactions called kōans represent another view of language. Here, language is not used to transfer doctrinal information or describe the world. Rather, by asking perplexing questions (e.g., “what is the sound of one hand clapping?”), language is used to undo the link of ontological assumptions and bring the mind to a state of knowing that is before concepts and forms. By meditating on these kōans, one reaches a breach of language and epistemological delusion, thus bringing them closer to awakening. Haukin, the great Zen master, taught:

By pursuing a single kōan he [the Zen disciple] comes to a point where his mind is as if dead and his will as if extinguished. This state is like a wide void over a deep chasm and no hold remains for hand or foot. All thoughts vanish and in his bosom burns hot anxiety. But then suddenly it occurs that with the kōan both body and mind break. This is the instant when the hands are released over the abyss. In this sudden upsurge it is as if one drinks water and knows for oneself heat and cold. Great joy wells up. This is called rebirth (in the Pure Land). This is termed seeing into one’s own nature...²⁴

Kōans do not yield to rational analysis for they are not symbolic and are not meant to describe ultimate reality. Rather, they are used to baffle thoughts at the point when the mind is most vulnerable from the practice of meditation in order to create changes in the mind. Kōans are not meant to say how things are but to cause one to see for oneself how they are. The functions here are not descriptive but corrective and performative. Most importantly, kōans require a response; that response is recognized as appropriate or still lacking. It is a rhetorical act whose success or failure can be readily determined by the

²⁴ Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Language," 7.

master. It is not a move in a rhetorical game, nor a dialogic turn a la Buber. It is something else—what is it? Answer immediately or die; that is the urgency of the koan. Gimello summarizes, “Whatever else may be, the *kōan* is surely one of the most effective and cunning linguistic instruments in the arsenal of mysticism.”²⁵

Activities and Expression

By 1200 silent zazen and kōans had become the Zen equivalent of the sutras. Dogmatic followers of Zen masters who criticized the limitation of literary texts went as far as to burn all sutras and images considering them to be spiritually harmful. Although Dōgen also criticized what he called “scholars who count words and letters” he opposed that nihilistic approach and believed in the importance of language. “The very notion of Shobogenzo, which lends its title to Dōgen’s work, implies a radical reinterpretation of the value of language.”²⁶

Central to Dōgen’s theory are the concepts of activities (*gyoji*) and expressions (*dotoku*), which he uses interchangeably. His students often associate ‘activities’ with cultic and moral activities, and “expressions” in relation to intellectual and philosophic endeavors, but as Kim suggests: “expressions are expressive activities, activities are activities’ expressions. Both are the self-activities and self-expressions of the Buddha nature.”²⁷ For Dōgen, Buddha nature does not exist as potentiality, it is only through

²⁵ Gimello, "Mysticism in Its Contexts," 78.

²⁶ Bernard. Faure, "Fair and Unfair Language Games in Chan/Zen," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 165.

²⁷ Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen, Mystical Realist*, ed. Wheatly Paul, Monographs of the Association for Asian Studies ; (Tucson: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1975), 83.

authentic and embodied activity that the Buddha nature arises: “The logic of the Buddha nature is such that it is provided not before becoming a Buddha, but after it. The Buddha nature and becoming a Buddha always occur simultaneously.”²⁸ It is not a potentiality to be actualized but actuality creating itself through whatever act is being done.

For Dōgen, the practice of the Buddha way necessarily consists of these activities in a dynamic ongoing movement which he refers to as the “perpetuation of the way.” This might be understood better if we briefly examine Dōgen’s understanding of time. Kim explains that the perpetuation of The Way through activity consists of the succession of the “circles of time, each of which has its circumference ever moving, with no limits and its center ever movable with circumstances. It advances without ultimate goal or purpose although it is not without inner reason. Since these endeavors are simultaneous and ongoing, when activity is exerted there is nothing but activity. Similarly, when expression is totally exerted, there is nothing but expression.”²⁹ Thus Kim interprets Dogen, “...while activity fathoms the way to be in unison with expression, expression has the path to be attuned with activity... [and man] enacts that which is impossible to enact and expresses that which is impossible to express.”³⁰

The importance of authenticity in activities-as-expressions and the nonduality with which he understands practice and realization are intimately related to Dōgen’s understanding of language and the way in which he understands the Scriptures and kōans. Sutras for Dōgen are the entire universe. Whether they use relative language, absolute

²⁸ Ibid., 85.

²⁹ Ibid., 95-6.

³⁰ Ibid.

truth and symbols, all the words and all things are necessarily sutras. For Dōgen, language and symbols are, dynamic and alive at the very core of life. Dōgen also criticizes the use of kōans as means of reconditioning conceptual thinking for the purposes of unleashing the intuitive potential for satori. This instrumental view of kōans is related to the negativist view of language and symbols. Dōgen therefore suggests to compassionately and carefully pursue the reason of nonsense. Kōans, he maintains, are not merely nonsense or meaningless expressions, but expressions of life and death. The kōans are not just nonsense which castigate reason but parables, allegories and mysteries which express the mystery of existence. For this reason, they are realized and not solved.

In Dōgen, the sutras and kōans are liberated from the ways in which they were previously understood—as tools or nonsense. Even the components of the sutras—words and letters—are given a positive significance and are no longer seen as instruments but as ends, which means that they embody the end in themselves. Not only do expressions include the semantic possibilities of words, metaphors, images, and gestures, but every act and even silence can be expressions. Indeed, trees, rocks, walls and tiles all participate equally in this expression. This resembles Wittgenstein’s performative rhetoric and his emphasis that some things should not be discussed but rather *shown*. In a famous “origin story” for Zen, the Buddha is asked about enlightenment, and he answers by raising a flower in silence and smiling. Dōgen criticizes those who take the Buddha’s *lack of* utterance as the supreme evidence of truth. The raising of the flower in silence is, for Dōgen, the Buddha’s “speech” or his expression. Kim explains that “even an infant’s mumblings or an alcoholic’s “snakes” are the possibilities of expression which are in turn

the activities of absolute emptiness and the Buddha nature."³¹ Without words and letters one can still express himself in myriad ways. Comparing the silent monks to mutes,

Dōgen says:

Do not think that mutes cannot express themselves. One who expresses is not necessarily lacking in muteness. A mute is also a person who expresses. The sounds of mutes must be heard. You must hear the words of mutes. If you yourself are not mute, how can you know him or speak with him? Studying in this way, you must completely penetrate the matter of mute.³²

Based upon this, the following admonition is given: “Do not loathe the words of mute because it is expression par excellence”. Dōgen does not idolize or denigrate language; he simply acknowledges its significance in the scheme of things. For this reason, Dōgen does not preach for transcendence of language but emphasizes its ‘proper’ use. In his writings Dōgen often took the liberty of poets to play with language and created new language forms and uses including new terms. The mimetic view, according to which language describes and explains, detached from the subjective operation of the mind, is here transformed. As with Wittgenstein’s emphasis on language games, language is here understood as embedded in the matrix of experience. Words do not point to something external but rather perform their function within the texture of human subjectivity.³³

Thus language is always dynamic and in constant flow, as is evident by the Chinese term for expression- *Dotoku*. Kim explains that this term is comprised of two Chinese characters: *do*- “the way” and “to say”, and *toku*- “to attain” and “to be able.”

³¹ Ibid., 103.

³² Francis Harold Cook and Dōgen, *Sounds of Valley Streams : Enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen, Translation of Nine Essays from Shōbōgenzō*, Suny Series in Buddhist Studies (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 104.

³³ Kim, *Dōgen Kigen, Mystical Realist*, 100-03.

Thus it signifies both actuality and possibility of expression. It emphasizes not what one expresses as much as what The Way expresses.³⁴ Expression does not necessarily mean expression in words, as there are multiple forms of expression. Dōgen writes: “when you thoroughly express this expression, you do not express what is beyond expression.”³⁵ Experience and expression, according to this view, are one.

The problem of the symbol and the symbolized are central in Dōgen’s thought. Traditionally, the symbol is designated by metaphors, provisional name, view, etc., and the symbolized is referred to as “emptiness,” “suchness,” “Buddha nature,” etc. According to this view, the symbol and the symbolized, or signifier and signified, are related to each other through likeness, as the symbol is considered to represent or point to the symbolized. This mimetic view of language is fatally dualistic and literalist for Dōgen. Instead, Dōgen suggests that the symbol is to be realized as an expression of the symbolized. This is possible only when the symbol is mediated, liberated, and reinstated by the symbolized—namely, absolute emptiness. The goal is therefore not to transcend duality but to realize it. Also in relation to the duality of speech and silence, Dōgen maintains that the inaudible resides in the audible itself.³⁶

The symbol and symbolized are often referred to by a certain likeness, and the symbol is said to represent the symbolized. Rejecting this dualism, Dōgen explains that even: “like this” means that both “like” and “this” are emptiness, hence thusness. This

³⁴ Ibid., 79-93, 94-96.

³⁵ Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*.

³⁶ Kim, *Dōgen Kigen, Mystical Realist*, 109.

view is reflected in Dōgen’s following analysis on the moon reflected on the water cited in Kim:

Sakyamuni Buddha said: “The true Dharma-body of Buddha is like the empty sky, and it manifests itself according to sentient beings like the moon [reflected] on the water.”

“Like” in “like the moon [reflected] on the water” should mean the water-moon (sui-gestu) [i.e., the non-duality of the moon and the water]. It should be the water-thusness (sui-nyo), the moon-thusness (gestu-nyo).. this is not constructing likeness (soji) [a dualistic resemblance between the symbol and the symbolized] as thusness; like (nyo) is this (ze) [in “like this,” both “like” and “this” are thusness]³⁷

Instead of saying “thusness is like this”, it says: “like this is thusness.” In that manner, the connection between the signifier to the signified is not the result of signification. It does not absolutize the signifier or relativize the signified which would be dualistic. Instead, Dōgen shows the way in which the ‘signifier’ can be the total realization or presence of the signified. For this reason Dōgen holds that even metaphors are ultimate realities.

When we examine Zen texts we can see that metaphors are used in a different way than in the West. For example, in the proverb previously cited: “the level ground is littered with skulls; the experts are those who pass through the forest of thorns” – the connection between enlightenment and the level ground is not established through likeness. The proverb does not employ the common logic of substitution as the proverb rather constitutes a reality which embodies both.

Dōgen’s view of the dream, for example, contrasts with the traditional view that uses the dream as a metaphor for a deluded state of being. While dream is often

³⁷ Ibid., 106-07.

contrasted to reality and the real, for Dōgen dreams are real and as legitimate as so-called ‘reality’. Dreams are another form of expressing and deciphering the possibilities of existence. In fact, both dream and reality are ultimately empty and unattainable. Moreover, Dōgen views existence as a discourse on dreams within dreams. His goal is therefore not to eliminate illusion by opposing it to reality but to see nothing but illusion in existence. Only when there is no distinction between reality and illusion is there no illusion. Realizing the non-duality of reality and illusion enables people to live wisely and compassionately.³⁸

In sum, Dōgen’s term ‘expression’ expands the semantic possibilities available. Expressions are no longer considered to be symbols for something else; they are rather like ‘performances’ in the Austinian or Wittgenstein’s sense (i.e. in the theatrical sense of impressing an audience and “doing what one says”³⁹) and are more akin the Jewish understanding of language. Metaphors play a different role in this logic and are not taken to be based on likeness. Similarly, nonsense expressions are utilized in Zen not only as means of transforming conceptual thinking but as expressions of the thusness of things. Many Zen kōans indeed include blows, shouts, and different forms of silence as non-linguistic expressions. These cannot be rationally analyzed and deciphered as symbols of external things, for they serve as expressions of the suchness and emptiness of reality. In the next section I analyze nine testimonies of awakening and will examine if and how Zen rhetoric, informs and shapes them.

³⁸ Ibid., 103, 17.

³⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., The William James Lectures (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1975).

Analysis

The nine testimonies analyzed in this section are taken from the book *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau. While a few of the testimonies were written specifically for the book, the majority appeared in Buddhist publications and were compiled and edited by Kapleau. With the exception of one testimony that was written twenty years after the satori experience, the narratives appearing in the book were written soon following the authors' breakthrough. The book was criticized for emphasizing sudden enlightenment and for reducing the benefits of Zen practice to the sole purpose of satori. While I agree with this criticism the testimonies nevertheless provide us with an uncommon material for rhetorical analysis relevant to the subject matter of this dissertation.

The testimonies were written by people of different genders, cultures (American, Canadian, and Japanese), ages (twenty four to sixty), and occupations (businessmen, artist, garden designer, school teacher government worker, housewife, insurance adjuster). Writers also differed in terms of their spiritual backgrounds—while some of the authors only had Buddhist background, the Westerners tended to have followed more than one spiritual tradition. These individuals were usually born as Christians or Jews and started practicing yoga and/or other forms of Buddhist practice later in life. While the majority had practiced Zen intensely for a few years prior to their satori, in two cases the satori occurred after a short practice period.

Although Zen stresses the importance of cultivating satori to develop a higher level of awareness where it becomes one's way of life, the satori experiences provided

here are generally considered to represent the lower levels of awakening (stages three and four). Notwithstanding, one of the nine testimonies analyzed here is of Yaeko Iwasaki, a lay practitioner who gained, shortly before her death, a high level of enlightenment rare in present day Japan.⁴⁰ When attained, this level is usually assumed within ten to twenty years after the initial satori experience, but as the letters Iwasaki wrote to her teacher Harada-roshi reveal, she reached it within a week! Her letters are accompanied by Harada-roshi's comments and analysis of her attainment. Interestingly, Iwasaki's rhetoric was analyzed by the teacher to assess her level of awakening, and his own comments shed further light on the connection between rhetoric and awakening.

The variety of these testimonies is important for distilling the essential characteristics of Zen rhetoric, regardless of individual elements such as age or profession. The patterns that emerged across the testimonies were heavily influenced by Zen rhetoric: reference to ineffability; rhetoric of suchness; nonduality; and use of elements of the Zen canon such as well known to kōans and metaphors. All the testimonies revealed growing gratefulness, humility, and compassion—especially in higher levels of awakening. Other themes that came up were reference to 'the real', delusion, time, and dialogue. Before unpacking each of the above themes, a description of the process of awakening as described in the testimonies would be in order.

⁴⁰ According to Kapleau "in India "she would undoubtedly be heralded as a saint and worshipped by thousands. Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 269.

Process

The awakenings reported here differed from one another, yet they followed a similar structure. Almost everyone described their past pain and linked their suffering to the quest for a teacher. They had gone through difficulties during the practice but developed growing peace and concentration culminating in a threshold experience, which they often compared to death. The change they went through was perceived as liberating, joyful and as a new beginning. The experiences were felt to be real, and they led to a transformation of the students' perceptions of self, the world and time. Once the initial burst of emotions that arose with the first levels of satori subsided, compassion and humility became more prominent. I will elaborate on the stages, one by one.

Philip Kapleau, the editor of *The Three Pillars of Zen*, found no exceptional features to the awakened individuals whose testimonies he compiled in the book. They were not particularly intellectual nor did they possess supernormal powers. "Suffering," he comments, "they had each known, but it was no more than what is experienced in the lifetime of an average individual."⁴¹ This leads Kapleau to the conclusion that the only distinctive thing about them was the courage to follow the unknown road, "prompted by a faith in their real Self."⁴² While I agree that the pain described is a normal human pain, it was perceived as meaningful and transformative for the authors. Almost all of the stories begin with description of their deep pain and anguish, and they often directly attribute to suffering the incentive for their practice. While it might be faith and determination that

⁴¹ Ibid., 191.

⁴² Ibid.

led some of them to follow the path and reach awakening, their testimonies seem to indicate that it was often despair and loss that prompted the quest.

One woman begins her narrative with childhood memories as a half Jewish girl under the Nazi occupation; another attributed her alcoholism and Alcoholic Anonymous as the incentives to her practice; others wrote about the illnesses they developed as a result of the work and the stress of everyday life. Describing life events that led him to ponder the meaning of life, a Japanese insurance adjuster referred to as Mr. A.K. writes:

I first began to think seriously about life and death at the age of twelve when my eight-year-old brother died of kidney disease. I grieved so much over his death that I collapsed at his funeral. Deep within me was a feeling so contrition [sic] and strong that I remember crying out: Forgive me, forgive me!” Four years later my only other brother drowned. This was such a profound shock that I began to question over and over. “Why is life so uncertain and miserable? Are we born only to die?”⁴³

These haunting thoughts led Mr. A.K to drop the idea of God and religion all together, convinced that they were just an opiate. It was the simplicity of Yasutani-Roshi and the simple practice of zazen that appeased his two years of skepticism: “Zen can’t be real...it must be fake.”⁴⁴

The practice, however, does not entail the end of pain. Many of the testimonies linger on the physical and mental pain experienced (especially) during long sessins: “When the sessin started it turned out to be something I had never imagined. It was, as a matter of fact, torture.”⁴⁵ And another writes, “concentration impossible, thoughts chasing each other like a pack of monkeys, ...excruciating pain in legs, back, and

⁴³ Ibid., 245, 6th testimony.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 246.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 234, 4th testimony.

neck...”⁴⁶ Pain, boredom, as well as growing concentration and peace are all experienced in the course of practice. Often, the testimonies report feeling stuck, yet determined to push through: “This time...I kept right on, determined to ‘ride it out.’ Gradually, however, the paralysis descended into my legs as well, and I could just hear my husband say in the distance somewhere that I was in a trance.”⁴⁷ The difficulties of practice and the stubbornness of mind are described in the metaphor of a wall that needs to be broken: “in spite of my struggles I could find no weapon in shikan-taza to break down the “iron wall...what I wanted, however, was a tool with which to push on, so I almost begged him to assign me the kōan, Mu.”⁴⁸

The pressure to keep concentrating in order to wake up, is often formulated in the familiar Zen rhetoric of death and the summit. Describing his response to the following self-admonations of another student: “ ‘You foolish, foolish, stupid guy! The summit! Die if need be, die!’ ” the author of one testimony writes, “The strength of his desperation flowed into me and I began to concentrate as though my very life depended on it.”⁴⁹ Crossing the threshold and finally waking up is experienced as a mixture of surprise, certainty, joy, and relief. However, many testimonies concede that what was realized had apparently been there all along: “I resumed my zazen, laughing, sobbing, and muttering to myself: ‘It was before me all the time, yet it took me five years to see it.’ ”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid., 211, 2nd testimony.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 263, 8th testimony.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 236, 4th testimony.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 249, 6th testimony.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 228, 2nd testimony.

This realization is too simple to be put into words and the writers are thus inclined to use the rhetoric of suchness, nonduality and familiar Zen kōans and metaphors to describe their experience. I will elaborate on these techniques later in the chapter, but the following examples should suffice to highlight this point:

Gradually I felt the pain in my legs less and less as the sessin progressed, and my mind began to expand until, imperceptibly, it reached a sublime state. I couldn't say whether I was unconscious of my existence or conscious of my non-existence. My only awareness was of both thumbs touching each other lightly. The sliding screen doors in front of me turned stark white and a purified brightness descended upon everything. I felt as though I were in paradise. My dominant feeling was gratitude, yet I wasn't aware of anyone's feeling grateful. Involuntarily I began to cry softly, the tears streamed down my cheeks.⁵¹

The above example shows the process of transformation; the physical transformation of the pain is accompanied by mental dissolution. Mr. C.S, whose testimony is given, became absorbed by the experience and was only partially aware of it. As will be examined later, this non-dual feeling is dominated by a deep sense of gratitude that can be expressed only tacitly—through tears. The next example by Mr. K.Y. also encompasses a few important themes:

At midnight I abruptly awakened. At first my mind was foggy then suddenly that quotation flashed into my consciousness: 'I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains, rivers, and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.' And I repeated it. Then all at once I was struck as though by lightning, and the next instant heaven and earth crumbled and disappeared. Instantaneously, like surging waves, a tremendous delight welled up in me, a veritable hurricane of delight, as I laughed loudly and wildly: 'Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! There's no reasoning here, no reasoning at all! Ha, ha, ha!' the empty sky split in two, then opened its enormous mouth and began to laugh uproariously: Ha, ha, ha!⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid., 234.

⁵² Ibid., 205, 1st testimony.

The above quote has a few elements that appear in many of the testimonies: dream, nonduality, kōan, death, and expression. To begin with, Mr. K.Y is physically and metaphorically woken up from his sleep with a clear realization. The description is realistic, but as described earlier in this section, the dream nevertheless serves as a metaphor for the previous deluded state of mind from which he had awoken. The insight came after long years of practice and an initial satori that was instigated by reading a kōan. Consequently, Mr. K.Y realizes that he is not separate from everything else. Interestingly, he does not claim that he is one with the mountains and skies, for this would be dualistic—unity implies duality, for where there is one there must be two. Rather, the mind *itself* is the mountains, rivers, and the great wide earth.

The nondual realization struck this meditator like a bolt of lightning, and it comes across in a visual form as the image of heaven and earth crumbling. Visions appear in various testimonies and were traditionally interpreted as delusions and steps on the path of awakening. It does not strike the current author as a coincidence that as Mr. K.'s sense of Self crumbles, so does the vision of the world with which he identifies. The dissolution of the world and oneself cannot be rationally understood, it is senseless. This author's reaction to this insight is physically expressed in a manner typical to many of the testimonies: laughter. These categories will be further elaborated later in the chapter.

Awakening from the previous deluded and painful state of mind is qualified as a great relief and is accompanied by deep gratefulness. Adopting the abbreviated Zen style, Mrs. L.T.S describes the transformative effect of her awakening and the deep relief it had on her: “The world no longer rides heavily on my back. It is under my belt. I turned

a somersault and swallowed it. I am no longer restless. At last I have what I want.”⁵³

Because this author initially described her restlessness and desire for knowing a truth greater than herself, it would seem that her realization was indeed in line with what she was seeking. Two additional testimonies stress the feeling of freedom and compare it to that of a fish in water.

Surely, the world has changed [with enlightenment]. But in what way? The ancients said the enlightened mind is comparable to a fish swimming. That’s exactly how it is—there’s no stagnation. I feel no hindrance....Dōgen, the great teacher of Buddhism, said: ‘Zen is the wide all-encompassing gate of compassion.’ I am grateful, so grateful.⁵⁴

The following testimony makes a similar connection between the sense of freedom and joy and a deep gratefulness that arises spontaneously :

Feel free as a fish...and so grateful. Grateful for everything that happened to me, grateful to everyone who encouraged and sustained me in spite of my immature personality and stubborn nature. But mostly I am grateful for my human body, for the privilege as a human being to know this Joy, like no other.⁵⁵

Just as almost all the testimonies began with descriptions of past suffering, nearly all of them ended with expressions of gratefulness and commitment to help all beings: “I cannot close this account without expressing my deep gratitude to Yasutani-Roshi, who led me, stubborn and willful, to open my Mind’s eye, and to all others who directly or indirectly helped me.”⁵⁶ Another concludes her experience with a Buddhist vow she used to sing every morning during sessin:

All beings, however limitless I vow to save.

⁵³ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 208, 1st.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 229, 2nd testimony.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 250, 6th.

Fantasy and delusion, however endless, I vow to cut off.
Dharma teachings, however immeasurable, I vow to master.
Buddha's Way, however lofty, I vow to attain.⁵⁷

To this, Iwasaki exclaims: "Now that my mind's eye is open the vow to save every living being arises within me spontaneously."⁵⁸ Whether the vow to save all sentient beings shaped this woman's compassion or compassion arises naturally as a result of enlightenment is hard to judge. However, as the realizations deepens, extreme emotions subside:

When I recovered my senses and began to reflect, I burst into laughter at the thought of how topsy-turvy my emotions had become. I was then able to appreciate the story of Enyadatta, who had gone mad believing she had lost her head, and the great to-do she made when she "discovered" it, though of course she had never been without it. But I am once more myself so there is no need to worry about me.⁵⁹

Once again, the realization is described through Zen stories and the new realization is portrayed as finding a head that was never lost. Rather than judging her previous emotional reaction, Iwasaki's humor and compassion are now inclusive of herself.

Although the tide of emotions calm down and the realization of nonduality settles, the result is not indifference but even greater compassion and commitment to save others:

But now I have penetrated deeply and have acquired an unshakable aspiration to Buddhahood, it is clear to me that I can continue my spiritual discipline forever and in this way perfect my personality to its fullest, impelled by the Vow, which rises naturally within me, to save all sentient beings.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., 245, 5th.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 276.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 280.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

It must be noted, given the current examination's focus on the process of awakening, that these discreet experiences are considered to be ultimately transformative by those describing them: "With this experience, I had established the basis for transforming my life. It is often said that Zen is not theory but practice. The truth of this was unmistakably brought home to me."⁶¹ If the previous pain was felt as the death of the world and the practice leads to a death of the ego, this individual death may be considered to be a new beginning and even a resurrection. In her second letter to Master Sogaku Harada reporting on her reaching another level of awakening, Iwasaki writes, "I have been resurrected, as have you and everything else, for all eternity."⁶² Master Harada comments: "This degree of realization is termed 'grasping the Ox'—in other words, the true attainment of the Way. It is the return to one's own Home, or the acquisition of fundamental wisdom."⁶³ Sixty year-old Mr. C.S., reports having experienced only a glimpse of awakening, but he still describes it as rebirth and a new beginning:

I was born in September, 1895, and so in September 1955, was just sixty years old. In Japan the sixtieth birthday is celebrated as the day of rebirth. I am happy that the opening of Mind's eye this very month coincided with the first steps of my new, second life.⁶⁴

In sum, the path of awakening is framed as originating from suffering, proceeding through death, and culminating with a new beginning. Each of the testimonies begins with reports of previous pain that led them to quandaries about the meaning of life and the commitment to look for a sense of peace and truth. While some reached awakening

⁶¹ Ibid., 235, 4th testimony.

⁶² Ibid., 279.

⁶³ Ibid., 280.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 238, 4th.

quickly, others needed years and different teachers before they reached satori. All of these testimonies, though, report on the difficulties encountered in the course of their training. In all cases, these difficulties were met and transformed with a breakthrough experience. The awakening from the previous pain and delusion entailed death of the world and one's ego or the emergence of a new and profound beginning. The change was described as liberating and was accepted with deep joy, gratefulness and compassion. The current study will now move on to describe some of the themes that emerged from a rhetorical analysis of the testimonies: the real, time, ineffability, nonduality, suchness and dialogue.

The Real

Since the notion of delusion and the real, as well as that of Great Death are the heart of the Buddhist teaching and the awakening process, these topics will now be examined further. It was previously mentioned that many of the testimonies recognize fear and suffering as motivating factors for practice. For instance, one author writes, "what led me to take this step [Zen practice] was the fear of death when I began to spit blood after contracting tuberculosis, and uncertainties which had begun to plague me about life itself."⁶⁵ In some cases the despair was so profound that it led to suicidal thoughts:

I came to Zen not out of no such lofty ideas as Kensho. The insecurity and utter confusion in this country right after the recent war⁶⁶ drove me to the point where I

⁶⁵ Ibid., 239, 3rd testimony.

⁶⁶ He is referring to the effect of The Second World War on Japan.

often thought of committing suicide. To quiet my apprehensive, turbulent mind I decided to do zazen.⁶⁷

The fear of death in the former testimony bears similarity to a fear of life expressed in the latter. Both led to hopelessness and desire for change.

Buddhist teachings begin with the first noble truth—that of dukkha or suffering. However, Buddhist teachings do not stop there and focus on the cause of suffering and the way to end it. The basic cause of suffering according to Buddhist teachings is the delusion of self. In his brilliant book *Lack and Transcendence*, David Loy highlights the existential psychological processes that result in death repression, a defense which often results in an intrusion of distorted symbolic material that can haunt people both individually and collectively. David Loy interprets this often repressed terror of future annihilation from the Buddhist perspective as an ultimate fear of groundlessness, which manifests as a sense of lack—the impression that ‘something is wrong with me.’ From this perspective, even the fear of death is a symbolic displacement of an ontological discomfort that stems from an underlying and vague sense that the ego-self is a mental construction. To the extent that we have a sense of autonomous self, we have a sense of lack that can manifest in many different ways. In its purest form it manifests as existential guilt or anxiety.

The tension between a desire for a secure sense of self and the fear of death, explains Loy, is only one manifestation of the problem of dualistic thinking. For example, the fear of failure dovetails the desire for success. However, compartmentalization does

⁶⁷ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 233, 4th.

not work since the two terms are interdependent—we can have both success and failure or neither but we can't have one or the other. In the same manner, the repression of death equals the rejection of life and implies “death-in-life.’ From the Buddhist perspective according to Loy, our primary repression is not death terror but a more fundamental fear that “ ‘*I am not real.*’⁶⁸ The consciousness, therefore tries to become grounded by objectifying itself. “I starve to become real, by becoming something.”⁶⁹

Indeed, Dukkha is reflected in the testimonies in Three Pillars as pain and purposelessness. One fails to experience the self as stable and life appears fleeting and deluded; this is often compared to dream or death itself. Out of this crisis arises the desire for something more stable and real:

Life was a bad dream. Struggling from one twenty-four hours to the next, I was controlled by fear and guilt and the secret bottle...I stopped drinking. I learned that there is something infinitely more powerful than my small human mind. And I knew that I Must find it, know it, see it, *be it.*⁷⁰

This approach, claims Loy, suggests that the only way to regain mental health is by resolving the sense of lack that haunts the sense-of-self. But through striving for perfection and a secure ontology, one can never be perfect enough, and thus all self-improvement projects are doomed to failure. Genuine life cannot be opposed to death. Ironically, it is only by embracing death that one can fully live. The two terms feed off

⁶⁸ Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, xiii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁰ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 250-1, 7th testimony.

each other.⁷¹ This gets us to the metaphor of death and resurrection that is prevalent in many traditions including Zen.

One afternoon, returning from an errand and stepping into my apartment, where I lived alone, the profound misery seized me and in helplessness I slumped to the floor. “I am dying,” I sobbed, “I have killed all my gods. I have no resurrection, I am totally alone.. stark fear and utter despair possessed me, and I lay on the floor for I don’t know how long until from the pit of the abdomen a cry came forth: “if there is any being in the entire universe who cares whether I live or die, help me, oh help me!”⁷²

Death here is not only physical but metaphorical—as her husband died so did her gods and the world as she knew it. With the deterioration of the external world no anchor was left. The author’s world and self are experienced as unreal, and the term she uses is death. This engulfing fear brought surrender, a cry for help, and a search for truth which lead her to India, Burma, and then to Japan. However, this was not the Great Death to which the Buddhists refer, for there was still desire for something else—something more real.

The Buddhists resolve this problem and that of death by deconstructing them and by revealing what came prior. One of the common metaphors referring to this is *the unborn*:

There is, O monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned; if O, monks, there were not here this unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned. But because there is an unborn...therefore there is an escape from the born...⁷³

⁷¹ Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, 13-18.

⁷² Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 254, 8th testimon.

⁷³ Udana 6; 7: 1-3. Cited in, Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, 54.

The common description of sunyata is “not created, not annihilated, not impure, nor pure, not increasing, nor decreasing.” In this usage, the concept of ‘the unborn’ does not revert to dualistic thinking and imply the return to the origin. Rather, life and death are not seen as opposites because they are themselves nirvana. They are not to be avoided nor grasped tightly.

The remainder of the current chapter explores the way in which this exact understanding is conveyed. At this point, it should be clear how the realization of nonduality would serve to bring about the ‘death’ of the ego-self and the freedom from the need to affirm oneself as real. As Mr. K..Y realized: “I’ve totally disappeared. Buddha is!”⁷⁴ At this point, Mr. P.K. burst out laughing and called: “I have it! I know! There is nothing, absolutely nothing. I am everything and everything is nothing!”⁷⁵ As stated by Iwasaki: “delusion and enlightenment are equally offensive... You can appreciate how enormously satisfying it is for me to discover at last, through self realization, that just as I am I lack nothing.”⁷⁶ By accepting oneself, one realizes also that non-enlightenment is perfect. By deconstructing the sense-of-self, so also the shadow of lack is not relevant. This non-dual approach is reflected in Dogen’s orientation to practice. For Dogen, practice *is* realization. To emphasize that Dogen even joined the two terms together: practice-realization; practice is not means to an end: it is itself all.

⁷⁴ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 205.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 287-8, 7th letter.

The rhetoric of Suchness

The testimonies abound with what I have previously named ‘the rhetoric of suchness.’ Many of the testimonies contain descriptions of the beauty and singularity of everyday moments: “It is often said that Zen is not theory but practice. The truth of this was unmistakably brought home to me. Sitting in solitude like a mountain—this alone is required.”⁷⁷ In spite of previous training, these moments often catch the students off-guard and evoke spontaneous expressions of emotions: “that’s it that’s all, that’s all, that’s it,” they [the chorus of frogs outside] seemed to be singing and mocking. A strange laugh bubbled up from deep within me.”⁷⁸ The recurring “that,” and “this is it” affirm the reality and substantiality of these moments. The writers do not avoid language all together, but these utterances remain nonpersonal. Consequently, while the clarity and the description are conveyed, these moments (or things) are not associated with a particular identity. Nature and everyday moments are thus seen with an undeniable lucidity. Looking at a tree during sessin one comments, “what I am seeing is absolute truth!”⁷⁹ The simplicity and precision give the impression of an undeniable sense of “realness.”

In another testimony western rhetoric and Zen rhetoric are intermixed. The Western writer attempts to use the rhetoric of suchness, but she still maintains the structure of a Western poem that asks to be unpacked:

Deeper and deeper I went...
My hold was torn loose and I went spinning...
To the center of the earth!
To the center of the cosmos!

⁷⁷ Ibid., 235, 4th testimony.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 236. 4th testimony.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 237.

To the *Center*.
I was There.⁸⁰

This was not yet her full realization, but as she progresses the rhetoric of suchness becomes more precise, just making room for expressions:

Questions...
Sharp voices...
Laughter...
Movement...
The roshi said: “Now you understand that seeing Mu is seeing God.”
I understood.⁸¹

This writer’s section moves between silence and words. Lingering at the end of each word, the reader is forced to absorb and reflect on the everyday actions. The writer does not explain her understanding directly nor does she use metaphors to convey her feelings or intentions. Each action is fully given space and is hence conveyed as an expression of suchness. There is an isolated expression of laughter, and that laughter is intended to be understood as *sunyata*, as an expression that is complete *in and of itself*. The section concludes with another affirmation of certainty; the writer does not explain it directly, but her certainty itself becomes an expression of suchness.

The realization conveyed above, of moments and things portrayed as self contained and beautiful, appears in many other sections and it alludes to the experience of nonduality as everything (or nothing) becomes saturated with ‘that.’

Abruptly the pains disappear, there’s only Mu! Each and every thing is Mu. “Oh, it’s this!” I exclaimed, reeling in astonishment, my mind a total emptiness. “ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling”—a bell’s ringing. ...All is freshness and purity itself. Every

⁸⁰ Ibid., 253, 7th testimony.

⁸¹ Ibid., 254, 7th testimony.

single object is dancing vividly, inviting me to look... every single thing occupies its natural place and breathes quietly.⁸²

For several authors, the kōan ‘Mu’ becomes a vehicle for experiencing and expressing nonduality where the sense of Self disappears and becomes one with all: “Quickly my concentration became strongly pinched, boring into Mu, thinking only Mu, breathing Mu.”⁸³ The use of Mu in the testimonies becomes an expression of suchness. Another writes, “Suddenly I realized: the fence and I are one formless wood-and-flesh-Mu. Of course!”⁸⁴ More practice leads this author to deepen the nondual realization: “Threw myself into Mu for another nine hours with such utter absorption that *I* completely vanished... *I* did not eat breakfast, *Mu* did. *I* didn’t sweep and wash the floors after breakfast, *Mu* did. *I* didn’t eat lunch, *Mu* ate...”⁸⁵ The italicizing and repetition of the capital letter *I*, highlight a realization of the artificial construction of the Self and a disillusioning of oneself from the concept. Mu serves the same function as the technical writing in the Abhidharma—it enables the writer to convey activities and expressions as unfolding rather than as ontological actions done by a subject.

Another student expresses the dissolution of Self: “One hot August evening... I suddenly experienced myself as a ripple spreading endlessly throughout the universe. ‘I’ve got it! There is no universe apart from me.’”⁸⁶ The metaphor of a ripple is common in both the yogic and Buddhist traditions. Bridging the relative with the absolute, the ripple stands for an individual self that is distinct from other waves, yet it has no intrinsic

⁸² Ibid., 238. 4th testimony.

⁸³ Ibid., 228, 2nd testimony.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 227. 2nd testimony.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 228. 2nd testimony.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 248. 6th testimony

existence apart from them and the ocean at large. Iwasaki also expresses unduality and suchness in her letters: “There is neither Ox nor man... Even though I would save them, there are no sentient beings to save.”⁸⁷ Borrowing from the Bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings, Iwasaki dismisses in a typical Zen fashion the divisions between sentient beings. However, she does not fall into negative dialectics by affirming their existence while, at the same time, deconstructing their separation. Following her next and more profound realization Iwasaki writes:

You alone can understand my mind. Yet there is neither you nor me. My body and mind in fact have completely dropped away... I am in the center of the Great Way where everything is natural, without strain, neither hurried nor halting; where there are no Buddhas, no you, nothing; and where I see without my eyes and hear without my ears. Not a trace remains of what I have written. There is neither pen nor paper nor words—nothing at all.⁸⁸

One by one, Iwasaki deconstructs the polarities of I and you, body and mind, Buddhas and non Buddhas, the senses and words. Iwasaki is here paraphrasing the following famous line from Dōgen:

To study the Buddha way is to study the self;
To study the self is to forget the self;
To forget the self is to be Enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas;
To be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas is to remove the barrier between the self and other;
No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.

Similarly, Iwasaki deconstructs her own writing: “no trace remains and this nontrace continues endlessly.” Later she dissolves even the distinction between the Buddha and herself: “at last I have recovered my composure with the realization that Buddha is

⁸⁷ Ibid., 278.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 279.

myself,”⁸⁹ to which the roshi responds, “I am Buddha, I am I. I am selfless I.”⁹⁰ The roshi comments in a slightly more accurate way, reaffirming both the relative “I” and the selfless objective “I” realized in *sunatya*. Importantly, with the realization of nonduality, every moment is just as it should be: not hurried or halted, and not transformed by categorical thinking.

Suchness is related to perfection, as with it everything seems to occupy its natural place and is accepted as self-contained and whole. Iwasaki writes, “Now that I have experienced that *tada* is itself perfection, I can at least repay your countless benefactions, and I am overjoyed.”⁹¹ Here, “*tada*” means “only”, “just”, “nothing but”. It refers to the ability to be one with whatever happens without conceptualizing or acting upon that thing. When one is eating or drinking, one should be absorbed in the eating or drinking and do just that. Once *tada* itself stops being a thing and becomes “just that”, whole in itself, another level of realization is reached. The roshi comments: “The essence of living Buddhism can be summed up in the word *tada*. Who is Shakayamuni Buddha? Who is Miroku? They are no different than you. Look! Look!”⁹² Once again in a typical Zen fashion, Iwasaki feels called to express her realization in a straightforward and joyous action: her expression, “Look!”

It is essential to note here the difference between the Western and the Japanese narratives. Although the process of awakening is similar, those with longer Zen training

⁸⁹ Ibid., 287, 7th letter.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 287, roshi's comment.

⁹¹ Ibid., 284, Iwasaki 5th letter.

⁹² Ibid., 285, roshi's comment.

and deeper awakening experience tended to use more distinct Zen rhetoric by referring to the Zen canon and/or adopting its style more often. Those trained with various traditions before practicing Zen expressed the other influences in their writings. For example, one of the narrators (a Canadian housewife) explains that her Mu practice was influenced by her Hindu training:

I was still perplexed about *how* to say Mu. Earlier I had tried considering it the same as the Indian mantra Om, endeavoring to be one with its vibration and without questioning what Mu was. Now I began to conceive of Mu as the diamond at the end of a drill and of myself as a driller working through layers of the mind.⁹³

Another author writes, “In perhaps half an hour a warm spot began to grow in my abdomen, slowly spreading to my spine, and gradually creeping up the spinal column. This was what I had been striving for.”⁹⁴ Here Mrs D.K approaches her practice determined to achieve certain results that are more typically sought in yoga practice, namely a rising of kundalini that initially manifests as warmth in the spinal column. This orientation may be a result of her previous training. The Westerners also report more hallucinations of light and other visions. The teacher often advises them on the proper way to let go of the hallucinations, concentrate harder, and keep advancing.

In summary, Zen teachings shape the rhetoric of the narratives, as well as the awakening experiences themselves. The rhetoric of suchness is one of the most important elements in the construction of the awakening experience and in dealing with what is hard to articulate. It consists of nonsense words, repetition of the term “this, “that”,

⁹³ Ibid., 261, 8th testimony.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 263, 8th testimony.

“thatness” and “suchness,” and the essential description of everyday moments and feelings without elaborating on anything else but what is present. There is no indulgence in intellectual or emotional reflection, metaphors, or analogies. Each moment is described in full and nothing else is added to it. The moments and hence the realization are thus constructed as perfect, self-contained, expressions of suchness. To avoid ontological descriptions and the construction of identity and Self, the writers often avoid using the pronoun ‘I.’ Sometimes there would be no body acting but simple a description of action, sometimes the writer would associate themselves with Mu, or whatever they are surrounded by. Similarly, moments are not acted upon or created by someone or something, rather everything and everyone is an expression of that very suchness. While ‘haunting’ consists of the reverberation of time and the continuity of action to emphasize the element of intertextuality and the problem of the referent, suchness strips all reverberations and cuts the link between signifier and signified in order to highlight the same problem of signification.

Ineffability

As discussed in the second chapter, Zen teachers are suspicious of language. For this reason, they will often evoke the problem of ineffability, both directly and indirectly.

“What is Zen?”

“I do not understand” was one master’s answer.

“What is Zen?”

“The silk fan gives me enough of a cooling breeze,” was another master’s answer.

“What is Zen?”

“Zen,” was still another response.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*.

It is not surprising then, that the testimonies here analyzed abound with claims for lack of words. Ineffability is used in three different ways in the testimonies: as a disclaimer announcing the limitation of words, descriptively, and as a means for constructing an experience.

In some cases the claim for ineffability is used to distinguish the uniqueness of the experience: “All at once the roshi, the room, every single thing disappeared in a dazzling stream of illumination and I felt myself bathed in a delicious, unspeakable delight.”⁹⁶ “Unspeakable” is here used as a similar adjective to “delicious”. The singularity of the event becomes a meaning making mechanism: “Every single thing occupies its natural place and breathes quietly. I notice zinnias in a vase on the altar, an offering to Monju, the Bodhisattva of Infinite wisdom. They are indescribably beautiful!”⁹⁷ Thus, the beauty of every single thing is inextricably bound to deep acceptance of everyday objects and moments as perfect, just the way they are.

The description often transforms into an expression of deep gratefulness and happiness: “This limitless freedom is beyond all expression. What a wonderful world!..I am so grateful, so grateful” cries one.”⁹⁸ Yaeko Iwasaki writes to her teacher: “Even you, my roshi, no longer count for anything in my eyes. My gratitude and delight are impossible to describe. I can now affirm that so long as we are conscious of enlightenment it is not true enlightenment.”⁹⁹ A claim for ineffability was used in these

⁹⁶ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 228. Second testimony.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 238. Fourth testimony.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 108. First testimony.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

cases not to reject the value of words but to highlight the importance of the realization; It is here not dismissive but descriptive.

One of the more intriguing uses of ineffability in the testimonies is in their constructive, rather than descriptive, use. In the following example, one of the practitioners describes the liberating effect that the roshi's remark on ineffability had on him:

[the roshi:] "Not even a sage can utter a word about that realm from which thoughts issue." The roshi repeated, adding, "No, not even a Buddha." "Of course! Of course!" I repeated breathlessly. "Then why have I been searching for such a word?" All at once everything became sheer brilliance, and I saw and knew that I am the only One in the whole universe! Yes, I am that only One!¹⁰⁰

Here, the acknowledgement of ineffability functions as a method that allows the student to stop grasping at words and concepts and to "just be". It thus enables the students to break free from the prison house of language, transcending the linguistics and entering nondual suchness. Although the Zen teachers cited earlier insist that the experience which is beyond words is at the same time all words in itself, claims for its ineffability were nevertheless maintained.

Metaphors, Kōans, Paradoxes

Zen masters developed unique rhetoric to overcome the problem of ineffability and remain true to the nature of the experience while still utilizing language. It is only natural that the authors of the testimonies would borrow this rhetoric when referring to their own experiences. In general, two main categories have emerged here: using kōans and familiar Zen metaphors and style when expressing one's realization; and referring to the Zen canon when explaining the transformation--especially the ways in which the kōans or other Zen rhetoric caused a breakthrough in their consciousness.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 249. Sixth testimony.

The metaphor of the liberated mind as a fish, mentioned earlier in the chapter, was used in some of the testimonies. One author writes, “The ancients said the enlightened mind is comparable to a fish swimming. That’s exactly how it is—there’s no stagnation. I feel no hindrance. Everything flows smoothly, freely.”¹⁰¹ Another makes the comment, “Feel free as a fish swimming in an ocean of cool, clear water after being stuck in a tank of glue...”¹⁰² The metaphor of a free fish was not invented by those writing the testimonies, but it was borrowed since it appeared to reflect their own experiences. In concert with previous claims made in this paper, it is possible that exposure to these metaphors constructed that very same experience for the students.

Other familiar metaphors used were that of the Ox and unknowing or beginner’s mind. Yakeo Iwasaki refers to the Ox to convey more clearly the depth of her realization: “I have reached the point of actually grasping the Ox and there is absolutely no delusion... There is neither Ox nor man.”¹⁰³ Zen Master Dogaku Harada comments on that, “Good! Good! This is called the stage of standing on the summit of a lone mountain, or coming back to one’s own Home.”¹⁰⁴ Throughout Iwasaki’s letters, Harada Roshi uses Zen metaphors to interpret Iwasaki’s stages of realization:

I confirm that she has truly seen the Ox, for there is in her experience deep self-affirmation, the desire to save all sentient beings, and the determination to discipline herself spiritually in her daily life. Only such an exalted mind can be called the mind of true children of the Buddha. But as yet there remains a subject who is seeing. Her mind’s home is still distant.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 208. First testimony.

¹⁰² Ibid., 229.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 277.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 278.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 277.

Iwasaki's rhetoric is used by the master to assess her level of attainment, which he explains in his more precise language.

'Not knowing' or 'beginner's mind' are other themes intrinsic to Zen rhetoric that were used in the narratives: "I have now had one great enlightenment and five small ones. I had forgotten who and where I was and what I was doing until today." To this Master Harada replies: "Going not knowing one goes, sitting not knowing one sits—this is true Samadhi in Zen."¹⁰⁶ Not knowing or beginner's mind allows for action without being caught in concepts or delusions—just acting, just sitting. Such a posture is what allows suchness and the rhetoric of suchness to emerge.

In some cases, kōans are indirectly used to describe the realization: "I've totally disappeared, Buddha Is! 'transcending the law of cause and effect, controlled by the law of cause and effect' such thoughts have gone from my mind."¹⁰⁷ The author is referring here to the second case of Mumonka, the kōan commonly known as Hyakujo's or Baizhang's fox:

When Baizhand lectured in the hall, there was always an old man who listened to the teaching and then dispersed with the crowd. One day he didn't leave. Baizhand then asked him, "Who is it standing there? The old man said, "In antiquity, in the time of the ancient Buddha Kasyapa, I lived on this mountain. A student asked, 'Does a greatly cultivated man still fall into cause and effect or not?' I answered him, 'He does not fall into cause and effect,' and I fell into a wild fox body for five hundred lives Now I ask the teacher to turn a word in my behalf." Baizhand said, "He is not blind to cause and effect.' The old man was greatly enlightened at these words.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 288.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 207. First testimony.

¹⁰⁸ hsiu Hsing and Thomas F. Cleary, *Book of Serenity* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), 32.

A lengthy explanation of this famous and intriguing kōan is beyond the scope of this paper, but one way of interpreting it involves duality. Stating that an awakened mind does not fall into cause and effect was too dual and made the teacher reincarnate into a fox for five hundred years. ‘Not blind to cause and effect’ evaded the discrimination between yes or no; one can either fall into cause and effect or not. The author in the testimony refers to this kōan in the same spirit. The possibilities of transcending the law of cause and effect or remaining subject to them are both ideas and concepts, and at that moment neither played a role in his experience.

In many cases, writers refer to the transformative effect the kōans had over them. In the following testimony, Mr. K.T. contemplates Bodhidharma’s first response to the Chinese emperor:

Picking up the first kōan in *Hekigan-roku*, I reflected on the question of the emperor: “What is the highest truth of the holy doctrine?” and then Bodhidharma’s answer “*Kakunen musho*, boundless expanse and nothing that can be called holy.” But I couldn’t understand this. Still reminding myself of a Japanese proverb, “if you read a book a hundred times you are bound to come to understand it” I sat down to zazen, devotedly reciting in my mind Bodhidharma’s answer, ‘*Kakunen musho*.’ After two days of this I experienced the same state I mentioned earlier, of looking at a cast clear sky.¹⁰⁹

As explained earlier in the chapter, the kōan was not inherently and immediately transparent to Mr. K.T. It was the combination of reading the kōan and silently meditating which effected him and led to the experience of vastness and openness that is typical to Zen realization. In many other cases, familiar kōans ‘suddenly’ make sense.

As the train was nearing Ofuna I ran across this line: “I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun

¹⁰⁹ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 232. Third testimony.

and the moon and the stars.” I had read this before, but this time it impressed itself upon me so vividly that I was startled. I said to myself, “after seven or eight years of zazen I have finally perceived the essence of this statement,” and couldn’t suppress the tears that began to well up.¹¹⁰

The kōan is both descriptive and constructive. Understanding it equals the nondual experience itself in which one *is* the sun, the moon and the stars. The experience is tacit and is thus *expressed* in a very physical way: tears and later a combination of cry and laughter.

Mr. A.K, a Japanese insurance adjuster, also describes his sudden realization upon hearing a familiar kōan:

On the third day I was struck with peculiar force by this remark of the roshi: “Mu is nothing but Mu!” It was a simple statement that I had often heard from him, but now it hit me like a lightning. “Then why on earth have I been imagining otherwise?”¹¹¹

Although this was not yet a satoï experience, the author experienced an important advance. The metaphor of lightning highlights the physical and shattering revelation of what was there all along: “Then why have I imagined otherwise?” The embodied and subsidiary awareness becomes focal, and the understanding is therefore clear but hard to articulate. Once again, the kōan is used to describe and construct an experience of thatness. Shortly after the above realization, the same author experiences another breakthrough instigated by a kōan:

I went to a zazenkai at which Yasutani-roshi delivered a teisho on the “Three Gates of Oryu,” a kōan from *Mu-monkan*. At one point he was saying” ‘How does your hand compare with the hand of a Buddha? Reaching out in your sleep for

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 205. 1st testimony

¹¹¹ Ibid., 247. 6th testimony.

your dislodged pillow, instinctively you recover it. One's whole being is no different than this timeless hand. When you truly realize this, you will spontaneously burst into laughter.” Hearing these words, my mind became enormously cleaned, and I trembled with joy.¹¹²

Although this also is still not considered satori, here the author makes another important advance on the tacit dimension. The kōan creates a rift of consciousness and conceptual awareness causing the mind to feel cleaned, or empty. This feeling is spontaneously expressed through trembling joy.

Paradoxes also appear in several of the testimonies. Upon awakening the kōans and the paradoxes are no longer found to be nonsensical. These perplexing statements and dialogues become the closest expression of Sunyata. For instance, “I am nothing, absolutely nothing. I am everything and everything is nothing!”¹¹³ The logical impossible simultaneity of “everything” and “nothing” is a common paradox in Zen that cancels dualities. The realization of sunyata here does not merely describe the surrounding world but is rather embodied so as to include the author himself. Iwasaki also uses an embodied paradox: “I see without my eyes and hear without my ears.”¹¹⁴ In a style that resembles Dōgen's, “you must listen to the words of mutes,” she refers to the senses, yet transcends them. Consequently, her description might sound paradoxical at first, but in fact it touches at the heart of suchness: pure expression that is both physical and beyond it.

To summarize the points raised so far: The testimonies adopt Zen rhetoric. When describing experiences that inherently resist description, the language crafted by other

¹¹² Ibid., 248. 6th testimony.

¹¹³ Ibid., 228. 2nd testimony.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 279.

awakened teachers seems to be the most widely appropriated. At times, these rhetorical forms were used not in a descriptive manner, but constructively—such perplexing statements created a breach in consciousness and suddenly made sense after long periods of meditation. Zen canon not only influenced the narrators to borrow familiar Zen rhetoric, but it also shaped their experience and their own style of writing. Consequently, we can witness paradoxes, the theme of unknowing, and the metaphors of water and fish, the ox, and the original mind. We can also see the use of paradoxes to embody the element of nonduality.

Expression

“You must listen to the words of mutes,” said Dōgen , because it is expression par excellence. Wittgenstein claimed that some things are impossible to talk about and should therefore be shown rather than discussed. Many of the narrators describe their actions during and after the experience of satori. Elaine Scary claimed that when people talk about their physical pain they often describe the accident which caused that pain. Unable to articulate the physical pain in words, the actions causing it convey the pain to the listeners who can therefore imagine the scene in their mind, identify the pain, and understand it. Similarly, in cases of awakening the actions during and following the awakening are very telling.

One writes: “feel numb throughout body, yet hands and feet jumped for joy for almost an hour. Am surprisingly free free free free.”¹¹⁵ The implausible combination of two contradictory emotions: crying and laughing frequently come up: “Although twenty-

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 207, 1st testimony.

four hours have elapsed, I still feel the aftermath of that earthquake. My body is still shaking, I spent all of today laughing and weeping by myself.”¹¹⁶ Realizing that the awakened mind has been there before them all along they crack out in a spontaneous laughter and tears: “I resumed my *zazen*, laughing, sobbing, and muttering to myself: ‘It was before me all the time, yet it took me five years to see it.’”¹¹⁷

The physical expression is often related to the certainty of a strong experience, and an inability to formulate it in words.

That morning I went to see Yasutani-roshi and tried to describe to him my experience of the sudden disintegration of heaven and earth. “I am overjoyed, I am overjoyed!” I kept repeating, striking my thighs with vigor. Tears came which I couldn’t stop. I tried to relate to him the experience of that night, but my mouth trembled and words wouldn’t form themselves. In the end I just put my face in his lap.¹¹⁸

Physical and humble contact comes to be seen as the choice of expression par excellence for that narrator. Iwasaki also finds no words to express her joy, but rather a gesture of gratitude: “All I could do was raise my palms out of joy, sheer, joy...”¹¹⁹ Just like the silence of mutes is their quintessential expression, the ‘being’ in the Austinian sense is here expressed in gestures, laughter and tears.

Expression is especially relevant since the state of awakening entails pure action without conditioning of previous concepts and ideas. Comparing the action of an awakened one to the one he experienced in Japanese style fencing match, Mr. K.T writes:

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 228, 2nd testimony.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 207.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 276.

In these two contests I experienced moments which I call the naked expression of enlightenment, in which I acted in response to my direct feeling and deepest mind, without considering victory or defeat, opponent or myself, and with no awareness of even engaging in a match. Faced with a situation involving life or death, one can act instantly, intuitively, free from illusion or discrimination, and yet not be in trance. It is a matter of training oneself, through the principles of Zen, to act wholeheartedly in every circumstance.¹²⁰

The performative rhetoric of gestures, blows, crying, and laughter thus becomes a relevant way to express the tacit understanding which the testimonies report.

Dialogue

An important element in the testimonies is that of dialogue—the dialogue between the teacher and the student and the dialogue in one’s mind. The teacher plays an essential role in providing linguistic and practical instructions to challenge the delusive thinking and belief in independent beings and an autonomous self. All the narrators describe interactions with their teachers but differ in the degree to which they describe it. For some of them, the roshi as a role model of serenity and peace was the incentive to start practicing: “‘Remember’ the abbot continued, ‘zazen is the most direct way to understand Buddhism, but choosing a good teacher is paramount.’”¹²¹ Often the roshi did not engage in philosophical explanations but provided direct and simple instructions for zazen: “In a quiet voice he [the roshi] spoke about counting the breath in zazen while facing a wall, but such questions as ‘What is the meaning of life?’ or ‘How can we get rid of suffering?’ he didn’t deal with at all.”¹²² The interaction with the roshi often began with clear instructions, “The roshi instructed me first to practice counting my breath, then following

¹²⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹²¹ Ibid., 245.

¹²² Ibid., 245, 6th testimony.

breath with my mind's eye, and finally to do shikan-taza, the latter being concentration without an object in mind."¹²³ This interaction would deepen as the practice got more intense.

The roshi instructs the students throughout their practice period, pushing them and giving guidance when they reach important crossroads. One student recounts, "The following morning at dokusan, the fifth day, the roshi told me I was at a critical stage and not to spare myself from Mu for a single instant."¹²⁴ The understanding gained is then tested by the roshi to assess the level of realization gained:

Dokusan finally came and I asked the roshi to test me. I expected him to ask only what Mu was. Instead he asked me: "What is the length of Mu? How old is Mu?" I thought these were typical Zen trick questions and I sat silent and perplexed. The roshi watched me closely, then told me that I must see Mu more clearly. And that in the time remaining I was to do zazen with the greatest possible intensity.¹²⁵

Rhetorical expression is the way to gauge the student's awakening. The clearer the insight, the more accurate and spontaneous the expression: At dokusan the roshi tested me with: "Show me Mu! How is Mu? Show me Mu when you are taking a bath. Show me Mu on a mountain." My responses were instantaneous, and he confirmed my kensho. Prostrating myself outside the roshi's doorway as I left his room, I overflowed with a joy which beggared description.¹²⁶ The spontaneous answers express the embodied rather than conceptual realization. The expression of awakening, whether linguistic or

¹²³ Ibid., 233.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 264, 8th.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 265, 8th.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 250, 6th.

performative in that way convey the student's level of awakening to the teacher. In the following case, the student's awakening is verified by the teacher:

At the evening dokusan Roshi again put to me some of the previous questions and added a few new ones: "Where were you born?"... "if you had to die right now, what would you do?"this time my answers obviously pleased him, for he smiled frequently. But I didn't care, for now I knew.¹²⁷

In some cases the awakening is 'shown' rather than verbally expressed.

I tried to relate to him [the roshi] the experience of last night, but my mouth trembled and words wouldn't form themselves. In the end I just put my face in his lap. Patting me on the back he said: "Well, well, it is rare indeed to experience to such a wonderful degree. It is termed 'Attainment of the emptiness of Mind.' You are to be congratulated."¹²⁸

The tacit understanding expressed by this student is formulated in a familiar Zen rhetoric by the more experienced teacher, thereby helping to deepen the insight by moving it from the tacit level to a conceptual one. The understanding itself is experienced as bursts of physical understanding that is maintained through insights that are expressed internally in a linguistic form. These sometimes appear in the testimony as an inner-dialogue between the one who suddenly "gets it" and a facet of self which has just 'observed' this insight process and understands.

This understanding is further tested, and it deepens in the dokusan when the teacher tests the student's understanding. The dialogue in one's mind is then reflected and taken to a higher level in the dialogue between teacher and student. In the words of Mrs.

D.K:

That afternoon, going out for a bath, I walked down the road thinking about Mu. I began to be annoyed. What is this Mu, anyway? I asked. What in the name of

¹²⁷ Ibid., 228, 2nd testimony.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 206.

heaven can it be? It's ridiculous! I'm sure there is no such thing as Mu. Mu isn't anything! I exclaimed in irritation. As soon as I said it was nothing, I suddenly remembered about the identity of opposites. Of course—*Mu is also everything!* While bathing I thought! If Mu is everything, so it is the bath water, so is it the soap, so is it the bathers. This insight gave fresh impetus to my sitting when I resumed it.¹²⁹

In a later segment she would use the metaphor of 'battle' that her teacher had taught in a lecture, entreating the student to embrace her inner enemy and realize that she is Mu and Mu is everything. In other words, a metaphor fostered an actual change in her consciousness. The theory and rhetoric of Zen nourished Mrs. D.K's experience. The seeds of theory that are conveyed in words and silent expression are again taken to the meditation cushion to help deepen the awakening. There is thus a movement between silent understanding and language, each reinforces the understanding previously achieved. John Welwood's theory, which holds that knowledge develops in the movement from silence to speech, finds support in the Zen testimonies.

The element of dialogue 'shows' awakening as an expression that arises between the student and the teacher and between one's thoughts. One does not wake up. Nor is awakening an event and a fulfillment of potentiality. Awakening in this manner becomes an expression. The passive language of the Buddhist scriptures is reflected through the practice and the language used by the ones practicing.

Time

Time is acknowledged a few different ways in the testimonies. First, the testimonies were written as journals and have entries of date and hour. These entries

¹²⁹ Ibid., 264, 8th.

frame the experience and the story as well as acknowledge the passing of time— Buddhism emphasizes impermanence and cautions against grasping to the ever changing reality (*anitcha*). As one westerner remarks at the end of her sessin: “a lifetime has been compressed into one week.”¹³⁰ The meaning of this comment is expanded by the student’s reports of visions and memories from her childhood during the sessin. Another student writes:

The ting of that tiny bell at the Pendle Hill sessin was the shock, the force that crumbled walls that had been gently forcing through four years of zazen, and before that five years of kriya yoga every day, every night...Sitting has become so familiar that that I accepted it as naturally and uneventfully as breathing.¹³¹

The bell, like the clock, becomes the sign of regularity and the ordinary order of sitting. In the flow of life, both during and outside sessin, the clock frames practice and life itself.

The reference to time, more specifically for the chimes of the clock, serve as a constant reminder that the sessin or life is slowly coming to an end. Hence, the need to practice becomes more urgent. One student writes, “At about seven in the evening I suddenly heard these words explode over my head: ‘thirty minutes to dokusan!’¹³² Make up your mind to come to Self-realization! This is your last chance!...”¹³³ Framed by an awareness of the constant flow of time, the chimes of the clock are a reminder to be *in* time—totally present and aware.

A strange power propelled me, I looked at the clock—twenty minutes to four, just in time to make the morning sitting...I *live my life minute by minute*¹³⁴, but only

¹³⁰ Ibid., 245, 5th testimony.

¹³¹ Ibid., 252, 7th.

¹³² Dokusan is a meeting between the teacher and the student to discuss the practice.

¹³³ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 250, 6th testimony.

¹³⁴ Italics mine

now does a warm love pervades my whole being, because I know that I am not just my little self but a great miraculous Self.¹³⁵

The realization of sunyata and the interdependence of all beings infuse life with new meaning. That understanding manifests itself as commitment to time and presence—to being in the present.

According to Loy's reading of Buddhism, due to our sense of lack, we try to make ourselves real in time for the present does not provide the ground we seek. The *now* threatens the sense of self for it does not provide us with the eternity we desire, either by perpetuating ourselves or somehow becoming impervious to the ravage of time. The Buddhist solution, according to Loy, is eliminating the duality between the self and time: "By realizing that I am not *in* time because I am time; and if I am time I cannot be trapped by time. To be time is to be free from time."¹³⁶

The sound of the clock is especially important as time seems to disappear during the sit. In an ultimate objective sense, 'the moment' is unending and thus encompasses the relative categories of past, present, and future, but in a more relative sense, time seems to change and pass away: "For a fleeting eternity I was alone—I alone was..."¹³⁷ To convey the fluidity of present time, the author must overcome the dualism of language which distinguishes the subject of the sentence from its temporal predicate. To do that, the author plays with the syntax: "I was alone – I alone was." The chimes express the tension between silence and sound, eternity and change, transcendence and presence,

¹³⁵ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 5th, 244.

¹³⁶ Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, 44.

¹³⁷ Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment*, 228, 2nd testimony.

subjective time and objective time, the absolute and the relative. “Being in time”

becomes the materialization of nonduality itself.

The big clock chimes—not the clock but Mind chimes. The universe itself chimes. There is neither Mind nor universe. Dong, dong, dong! I’ve totally disappeared, Buddha Is!...transcending the law of cause and effect, controlled by the law of cause and effect’ such thoughts have gone from my mind. Oh, you *are!* You laughed, didn’t you? This laughter is the sound of your plunging into the world.¹³⁸

External time and internal time as well as Self and the world become one. There is no mind and no clock; there is, in other words, no time. Nonduality is here emphasized in the cancellation of both the subjective I and the objective world. However, the disappearance, or death of I and the world interestingly entail the plunging into the world and into time: “4.am on the 29th/ Ding, dong! The clock chimed. This alone *is!* This alone *is!* There’s no reasoning here.”¹³⁹

In sum, since the testimonies follow the format of journal entries and letters, it is not surprising that the testimonies abound with references to the passing time. They frame the awakening narrative, punctuate the flow of time and thus denaturalize the taken for granted life and its events. Silence and sound, the relative and the absolute come together in the chimes of the clock. The death of subjective time coincides with the death of Self, yet on the relative level, time is still marked. The chimes of the clock and the rings of the bell therefore call the students to practice and to live fully present in each moment.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 207, 1st testimony.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 208, 1st testimony.

Chapter Summary

The rhetoric of awakening in the testimonies here analyzed follows a specific structure: Pain is often the incentive to look for either a relief or higher meaning to life. As life crumbles around them, the narrators feel a need to come to terms with death and to feel real. The practice is marked by some meaningful breakthroughs leading to a satori experience. Realizing the first noble truth of dukkha the students try to avoid or solve it. Dealing with and embracing one's pain through practice had led to the realization of the artificial construction of their sense of self and to greater compassion and freedom.

Buddhist scriptures emphasize dependent origination, sunyata and the ways in which language constructs distinct identities. The scriptures avoid an ontological use of language and tend to refrain from talk about the actual experience of awakening. At the time, the limitation of words is acknowledged, and therefore ineffability is not constructed ontologically, as an object that exists outside the text. To avoid duality, Zen teachers do not emphasize transcendence of language but acknowledge its function and proper place in the general scheme of things. Awakening is thus mostly described as beyond all words, *at the same time* as it is all words. In the testimonies, however, a few of the narrators claimed that their awakening was inexpressible. These claims were used as an adjective to highlight the uniqueness of the realization and as an objective description of a tacit realization—in such moments, one becomes aware of the sensations before any awareness of I who knows. The claims for ineffability were also used as means for constructing that very experience in the practitioner.

In the Zen view, especially in that of Dōgen , language is not understood to be mimetic. Words are not regarded as symbols of things behind the text, for this would be too dualistic. Both the signifier and the signified are viewed as ultimate expressions of sunyata. According to this logic, words do not have an indexing as much as a performative function. Similarly, all verbal and nonverbal actions are regarded as possibilities for expressions of sunyata, depending on the intention with which they are performed. The testimonies thus abound with nonverbal expressions such as gestures, crying, and laughing that are not regarded as symbols or allegories of the knowledge gained. Rather, these actions *express* the awakening. Often, expressions that are generally considered to be contradictory, such as laughter and tears, appear together. Thus, even physical expressions which express both ends of the emotional continuum resist falling into duality.

Likewise, all writers made use of what I call ‘the rhetoric of suchness.’ Instead of relying on cognitive and emotional description, students’ accounts of the moments of realization are essentialized and expressed in a very concrete manner. Minimal words are used in most cases as means of expressing sunyata. Explanation and elaboration would add additional layers of meaning. Therefore, the rhetoric of suchness strips down all meaning to enable the natural expression of suchness itself. In these descriptions there is no use of “I” unless it is to convey nondual identification with the moment, or part of a mantra. The aesthetics here is different than aesthetics of longing and haunting which aspires for something beyond. The rhetoric of suchness deconstructs the longing but focuses on the present as already contained and whole. Rather than reverberations of time

into the present, the present already contains all past and future within itself. For this reason, it is also often described as ‘perfect.’

While metaphors are generally based on the logic of language through indexing—where one term is substituted for another—metaphors are used differently in Zen rhetoric. Indeed, some common metaphors were abundant in the Zen literature and testimonies. The metaphor of death and rebirth in relation to awakening, as well as those of original mind, unknowing, fish, and ox were often used. In Zen, however, the metaphors are often stripped of extra words and used, as in the rhetoric of suchness, as expressions of sunyata. Other common tropes used here were paradoxes and nonsense. These were used to undo the habitual and conceptual thinking. Upon awakening, these kōans were no longer regarded as nonsense or tools but cited by the speakers as expressions of their realization.

Awakening was not constructed as an event, nor was it a solitary occurrence or potentiality. Rather, awakening arose in the movement from silence to speech, from instruction to practice, and vice versa. It arose in the space between the words, between the gongs of the bell, between the breaths, and between the teacher and student. The outer dialogue was reflected by the inner dialogue within one’s head. The use of dialogue as a rhetorical tool constructs the awakening not as something that is done but as something that emerges. In other words, awakening arose in the moment, between people and is therefore constructed as the expression of the Way. One might therefore say that the experience was the expression and the expression was the experience.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Although to speak of a rhetoric of ineffability is a paradox at face value, this study shows that it is a major concern in the study of language, consciousness and the public sphere. Ineffable moments are haunted by the desire to transcend the limitation of language and to put into words what by definition transcends words. Ineffability therefore gets at the heart of the most basic understandings of language and the sense-of-self and the study of ineffability provides a rare opportunity to examine the construction of subjectivity, agency and ultimately reflect a range of worldviews.

The initial purpose of this dissertation was to examine the rhetoric of ineffability through discourses of awakening in the context of three different religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Zen. The underlying assumption was that the experience of awakening is ineffable and that those who “wake up” would use intriguing rhetorical moves to overcome the limitation of language. A second assumption was that the rhetoric of those awakened would be shaped by the rhetorical traditions of their respective religions. Close textual analysis of the awakening stories revealed that in spite of some interesting similarities, the rhetoric of the awakening narratives and the awakening experiences themselves differed between the traditions examined. The rhetorical moves that were chosen to describe each experience disclosed different conceptions of subjectivity and transformation that are always deeply embedded within the respective hermeneutic and religious context in which they arose. I will elaborate the ways in which the rhetoric of awakening and ineffability was related to the construction of temporality, subjectivity,

haunting and aesthetics later in the chapter. However, the discussion begins with this finding: that ineffability' as an idiom and as a practice is itself rhetorically constructed.

Ineffability as a Rhetorical Construction or the Relations between Language, Metaphysics and 'Ineffability'

The term 'ineffability' is born out of a representative understanding of language and the belief that words represent things in the world. Ineffability assumes that some things are beyond the normal order of signification and therefore cannot be represented in words. However, this understanding of language and ineffability is grounded in Greek philosophy and Christian understanding of textuality and does not apply to other languages and systems of thought such as Judaism and Zen.

The conventional understanding of language as arbitrary and as based on human convention does not apply to Hebrew which is considered to be a sacred language. Hebrew does not subscribe to the representative logic according to which there is correspondence between things in the world and the words which are supposed to represent them. Instead, there is no separation in Hebrew between words and things outside the text. The Hebrew *davar* can be translated as both a word and a thing, but "thing" does not operate here as a substance or being but as a reality. Accordingly, words do not represent but create and support reality; they do not have an indexing but a performative function. In the same way in which the *Word of God* has a creative force, God shares with man the unique capacity of creation through linguistic activity. Not only is the written word not subordinated to the spoken word, the letters themselves are understood as creative elements that convey more than trivial information. Reality was

divinely verbal but not as substance. Since the divine and linguistic reality encompass everything, and since Hebrew is not based on the mimetic model of language there is never an external point of view; words and things are not understood as distinct and there is no need to mediate the gap between them and transcend the text towards the real thing that exists outside of it.

While in Christianity, language is equated with human imperfection, in Judaism there is no aspiration for perfection in terms of completeness. The Biblical narrative is not meant to represent a reality but is intentionally mysterious and ‘incomplete.’ The text’s all-embracing unity and wholeness does not exist as a finished product but as an open text that is always in the process of production. Rather than transcendence of the text, Judaism therefore views divinity in the act of endless interpretation and immersion in the scriptures. Rather than looking for universal and abstract truths outside of the text, the focus in Judaism is on particular and concrete differences *in* the text. Since the Torah exists as an all-embracing unity that is ever-developing, interpretation and reflection are not understood as external imposition but as a part of the linguistic creativity. Nothing is left out of the text’s scope and nothing is irrelevant. The written words, the letters, the punctuation, as well as the gaps and silences between the words are understood as part of the linguistic process of writing and interpretation. Since the texts encompass everything, and since language sustains and creates reality, there can be no movement beyond the text. Ineffability as a distinct realm—which encompasses all that is beyond language—is therefore not in accord with the basic understanding of language and metaphysics in this religion.

Similarly, in Martin Buber's awakening as described in the texts analyzed, the ineffability of his transformation is not emphasized. Moreover, Buber does express aspiration for transcendence of language and the world towards an ineffable realm; on the contrary, Buber's transformation consists of movement from what he perceived to be a mystical escapism and isolation to the very midst of life. This change is expressed in his writings as a focus on the particularities of meeting with people and attending to the specifics of interactions: the words as well as the silences embedded in them. Buber mentions only once that his experience was beyond words but this claim does not assume the mystical longing which characterizes his early writings. Instead, the claim for ineffability appears as a description of a moment in which his subjective awareness was suspended. Ineffability is used here not as a plight from textuality, but as an element in the process of realization—a point to which I will return to later in the chapter. Likewise, Buber does not praise silence as a sign that points to a divine word or as something that is beyond the order of signification. Silence is constructed as a part of the textual matrix and is used as a performative tool to convey his silent experience. The awakening experience becomes apparent and important not because of its ineffability but because of his different orientation and increased attentiveness to the other. In sum, ineffability as a concept and as a practice does not exist in Judaism and hardly appears in the texts analyzed.

By contrast, ineffability assumes a special status in Christianity. The construction of ineffability as a desired element is the result of the mimetic understanding of language—the use of allegory as a dominant trope at the basis of that system. If the

Hebrew *davar* functioned as both a word and a thing, the Greek term *onoma*, (“name“) is synonymous with name. The original unity between words and things, discourse and thought was therefore disrupted. Words were no longer associated with reality, but in accordance with Greek thought they were understood to be arbitrary signs pointing to things outside the linguistic order. The Socratic turn which emphasized movement from the words to the ideal forms outside the text was further developed in the Augustinian theory of the signs. Christian theology therefore distinguished between the sign and the original presences and created a hierarchy between them. The assumption that things are pointed to by words, and the assumption that these things are therefore more real than words established the concept of ineffability (which does not even exist in Hebrew) as an independent and a desired domain. This understanding of language was criticized by Derrida as onto-theological and was at the heart of the hermeneutic turn. For Derrida, the problem of language stems from the distinction between figurative and proper meaning and the assumption of a source of signification that exists somewhere outside the text.¹ In a language based on a mimetic model, there is an external standard of correctness against which a language is “measured.” Post-structuralist would come to argue that origins do not exist and that words do not point to external things outside of the text. Language use is always ideological and the use of words constructs a particular worldview and one’s experience in that world.

An important element in the construction of Western metaphysics and the concept of ineffability is the use of allegory and typology. In the Christianity chapter I have traced

¹ Ferguson, "Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language."

the ways in which allegory was adopted as a dominant trope. The irreconcilable oppositions between Jews and Gentiles, righteousness and sin, God and the world, soul and flesh, the spirit and the letter, life and death were mediated in St.Paul through the figure of Jesus. Instead of textual mediation, Paul introduced a personal mediation through the figure of Jesus. The theory of incarnation merged the dualities—the word was made flesh. The risen Christ has become the ultimate referent, beyond the order of signification all together.

To speak to both the Jews and the Greeks and persuade them of the importance of Jesus, St.Paul had to adopt a rhetorical figure that would be understood by both communities. He had to read the scriptures in a new light and adopt a new language. Allegory, the reading of one system in terms of another was therefore adopted and a distinction was accordingly made between two levels of readings: the literal and the spiritual. The Old Testament was now read as figures and shadows of the New Testament; that is, it was read ‘spiritually’—as predicting the new substance that is Jesus. A metaphysical model based on the distinction between the literal and the spiritual was further formed—textuality was now associated with the material body, the fall into time, sin, darkness, delusion, lethargy, sleep, mortality and death. Divinity, however, was associated with escape from textuality, silence, infinity, transcendence, immortality, light, Truthfulness, spirit and awakening. While for Jews, divinity entailed deeper immersion in the texts, for Augustine and the Church fathers, textuality was associated with everything that is imperfect. Divinity, however, was embodied in the image of Jesus and silent suffering. The ultimate goal was God and words were considered useful only as means

for achieving the Divine. The linguistic move was therefore from a word to a thing to silence which was understood as a sign pointing to God's word. The desired movement, however, was beyond textuality all together and into the infinite and inexpressible divine. Thus, the ineffable is contrasted with all that is textual, human and finite.

Ineffability and silence are therefore central to Christian rhetoric but since language was understood as representative, ineffability and silence were understood in a similar manner. In a mimetic language, words were understood as pointing to an external source and had distinct identities apart from the source they were to represent. Silence and ineffability were similarly constructed as independent concepts and as signs that point to something beyond the text. Because language was also associated with temporality and time, ineffability was described through the constructing symbols of space. In a few cases, awakening was therefore associated with the visual metaphor of the color white thereby creating associations of muteness and infinity as things that exist in space. The visual and spatial bias that is reflected in the symbols of both ineffability and silence are characteristic of the understanding the Classics had of their language and heritage. The Greeks focused on images and understood signs visually as likeness of things. Similarly, the Christian God has a visible figure and awakening entailed transfiguration. The use of spatial imagery for describing silence contributed to making the concept ontological and further established the phenomena of the transcendental signifier that dominated Western thought.

Buddhist and especially Zen teachers have also been cautious of language, but the concept of

ineffability does not exist in this tradition. From the Buddhist perspective, language constructs separate and distinct identities while in fact everything is interconnected and ‘empty.’ Some Buddhist texts such as the *Abhidharma* artificially constrain language to avoid the construction of independent identities and to illustrate the ways in which everything is dependently originating. For this reason, many Zen teachers have emphasized the practice of silent meditation (*zazen*) rather than intellectual discourse. However, the silent practice was not aimed at the transcendence of language and the world but towards the understanding of *sunyata*—the empty nature of all things. The use of language was also strategic, perplexing kōans were used to undo conceptual thinking and prepare the mind for the realization of *sunyata*.

The influential Sōtō Zen teacher, Eihei Dōgen, criticized the derision of Buddhist texts by some Zen teachers of his time who thought of the texts as too dualistic. Instead of viewing language as detached from the subjective experience, Dōgen emphasized the ways in which language is used in the matrix of experience. Rather than viewing language as representative and merely descriptive, Dōgen emphasizes its constructive and performative nature. Rather than viewing the symbol as *representing* the symbolized, he emphasized that the symbol is to be realized as an *expression* of the symbolized. While the connection between the signifier and signified is often based on likeness, Dōgen maintains that even “like” and “this” are emptiness, hence *thusness*. The sutras, the kōans, and even the alphabet are no longer seen as instruments for inducing an experience but as ends which embody the end *within* them. Dōgen maintains that not only words, metaphors, images and gestures are expressions, but every act and even silence

are expressions of emptiness. Since the understanding of sunyata is essentially non-dualistic, to describe it as ‘ineffable’ would be an act of negation. The opted description would therefore be that sunyata is both beyond names and forms, as it *is* all names and forms.

The term ‘ineffability’ therefore already discloses inherent biases in the understanding of language and reality. The metaphysical beliefs and the linguistic model are interconnected and consequently determine whether ineffability even exists, if it can be described as ‘ineffable’ if it does, or whether it may be said to exist as ‘something.’ For this reason, the term ‘ineffable’ is grounded in a particular (and I would claim *mimetic*) worldview and is therefore considered a rhetorical construction. This does not mean that language can describe everything, but to say that some things remain ‘beyond’ language already assumes a representative orientation. To say that ‘there is nothing beyond language’ does not mean that language constructs reality and that nothing is left outside of its constructive or signifying capacities. Rather, in line with my reading of Derrida in light of this analysis, it means that language and experience are co-created—a point I will elaborate upon later in this chapter. In the next section, I summarize the ways in which ineffability and awakening were constructed in the context of the three religions analyzed in this dissertation.

The Construction of Awakening and Ineffability

In the previous section I summarized the different status of ineffability and the ways in which

different models of language corresponded with different understandings of what ineffability entails. In the representative model of Christianity, ineffability meant transcendence of language whereas in Judaism language was constitutive, all-encompassing and ineffability was hardly discussed. Zen, on the other hand, was cautious of language's ontologizing capacity and strategic language was practiced and employed. In Wittgenstein's terms, this means that language games in Zen are very different from those of Judaism, or Christianity or any other religion for that matter. In this section, I elaborate on the particular tropes and rhetorical moves through which the experience of awakening was constructed in each religion. I begin with summary of the rhetorical moves that were found to be similar across the traditions and then elaborate on the ways in which they differed. The rhetorical tropes used by *all* traditions were: disclaimers that the experience was beyond words, and the use of silence, metaphors, and paradoxes.

Similarities

Disclaimer of Ineffability

The 'disclaimer of ineffability' trope was found to be much more prevalent in Christianity than in the other traditions, especially in later awakening stories. However, Buber had once referred to a moment of silent contemplation as 'beyond words' and a few of the Zen students have also done the same. Disclaimer of ineffability functioned in a few ways: 1) as a literal description of a gap in thoughts, 2) as an adjective equivalent to a high degree of superiority, and 3) as means for distinguishing the experience from the natural order of reality. In Christianity, the disclaimer of ineffability trope was mostly

used to construct the experience as transcendence of the ordinary and the temporal. In Thomas Merton's later writings, as well as in Buber and Zen, the disclaimer was used mostly as an adjective to describe a gap in thoughts. In Zen, the disclaimer was also used to construct an experience of *sunyata*. Of course, it is important to note that there is a difference between claiming that an experience is beyond words and a simple recognition that one has no words to describe it. For this matter, this study focused on the ways in which the experience was nevertheless articulated in spite of the above difficulties.

Metaphors

Although metaphors were used in all traditions, they operated differently in each one. In Greco-Christian thought, metaphor functions on the level of a word or a name. It depends on a relation of resemblance where one word or a name is transferred to another word or name or idea. Handelman emphasizes that resemblance passes here over to substitutions, identification, and the ways in which differences underlying the similarities are effaced.² When the description of silence is used, it is understood in the spiritual reading as a sign of God which cancels the literal meaning of silence per se. In a similar manner, the metaphors of night, darkness, etc. are understood as symbols of suffering. The process of awakening causes another level of substitution when the metaphors of darkness and night are substituted with those of light, infinity, and silence.

² Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

The metaphoric logic operates differently in Buber. First, the relation between a word and a thing is not based on substitution in Hebrew. The underlying logic of Rabbinic thought is based on contiguity, juxtaposition and association. Resemblance does not pass into substitution and the literal is not cancelled. A condition does not turn into identity: *as if*, for example, does not turn into *is* and the verb *being* does not even exist. The metaphor of a bridge retains its multiple meanings as a bridge between two worlds on a judgment day, which reminds the readers that the judgment day focuses on relations between fellow man and the necessity to make a bridge between different worldviews. Moreover, the metaphoric logic in Judaism does not necessarily function on the level of a word. When Buber speaks about the relation between languages, he speaks about languages but also about the importance of attending to differences in a more general sense.

In Zen, the metaphoric logic operates in a slightly different manner as well. According to Dōgen there is no cancellation as both the symbol and the symbolized are to be understood as empty expressions of sunyata. The use of metaphors becomes the expression of sunyata and the ways in which the metaphors are expressed attest to the depth of realization attained.

Paradoxes

Paradoxes were used mainly by Zen practitioners but also in Augustine and in Merton's later writings. While paradoxes were used to undo ontological thinking in Zen,

in Christianity and Judaism they were mainly used to affirm the unique existence of God or the awakening experience as not yielding to the natural laws of this world.

Silence

Silence was used in all traditions but in various ways. In Christianity, silence was praised and was constructed as a sign which points to God's word. Due to the spatial metaphors with which it was described, it assumed an ontological substance and was contrasted to temporality. Martin Buber attributed to silence the same significance he attributed to words; the focus was on the ways in which silence was constructed in juxtaposition to speech in order to convey particular information. In both Zen and Buber, silence was constructed through gaps and lacunas in the flow of description, therefore creating a similar experience for the readers. After a survey of the ways in which tropes were used somewhat similarly across religions, I now describe the rhetorical moves particular to each tradition.

Differences

Christianity

Ineffability was mainly constructed through *allegory and typology* in combination with *imitation and replacement*. Allegory and typology enabled Paul to construct metaphysics that is based on duality and is reflected in one's psyche. The Good, light, divine, ineffability, immortality, and spirit were contrasted and considered superior to temporality, the body, sin, darkness and evil. Since the differences could not be tolerated,

a need for mediation—which would resolve the differences and bring them into unity—
arose.

Jesus was constructed by Paul as the mediator of the irreconcilable gaps between the Jewish and the Greek discourses, between life and death, and between words and silence. Since Jesus is both human and divine, ‘the Word made flesh,’ it is through the mediation of Jesus that awakening resolves the same dualities. There is therefore a deep connection in Christianity between awakening and ineffability. It is through his awakening that Jesus breaks the order of signification and becomes the mediator of differences. Jesus is the ultimate form that is beyond signification all together. In Christianity, claims for ineffability are therefore based on the transcendence and ineffability of Jesus. Since awakening in Christianity imitates that of Jesus, other awakenings are naturally understood to be beyond signification hence, ineffable. Imitation of elements in Jesus’ awakening (i.e, inner conflict, a divine call, transfiguration, replacement of the old life by new life, suffering by love and more than everything else: the actual meeting with Christ the lover) attest to the ineffable dimension of the experience.

Abstract terms such as love, mercy, and grace were used as place holders for everything that is beyond the order of signification. By using a qualifying term, an aspect of reality is marked as assuming a distinct identity. A tension is therefore created between expectations for identity—due to the particular use of terms—and the fact that the terms are so abstract that they cannot be defined. An experience and/or divinity are therefore constructed as some ontological ‘thing’ that is also ineffable.

The dominant rhetorical move in Christianity is the use of *metaphor* which is understood through the mechanics of *replacement*. The testimonies examined abound with metaphors that were grounded in *visual imagery* and based on the initial duality described earlier. The common metaphors have been: death, rebirth (when referring to the change and the substitution of the old life with new one); darkness, night, dream (when referring to the previous suffering and delusional thinking), and awakening, morning and light as symbols of a new beginning and purity. The metaphor of unknowing which is central to Zen was used in the classic Christian text *The Cloud of Unknowing* to which Thomas Merton referred in order to convey the element of ineffability. The metaphor of water was also used by Merton in later writing to express naturalness. Finney referred to baptism as a metaphor for a new beginning as well as to describe his physical sensations. An erotic metaphor was used in both Christianity and Judaism but it was understood differently in these religions. In Judaism the metaphor has multiple meanings, one of which refers to the relation between the people of Israel and God. In Christian mysticism, the image of the lover is understood as referring to Jesus himself.

Judaism

As we have seen, the concept of ineffability does not exist in Judaism and the notion of awakening does not refer to a dramatic experience that is essentially beyond words. Buber himself characterized his awakening as a movement from mystical isolation to the midst of time and language. Therefore, his rhetoric is not aimed at conveying transcendence and ineffability but vice versa—participation in everyday world. Buber

constructs this message through rhetorical moves characteristic of Jewish thought. One of the most important moves was his focus on particulars. In his writings, Buber emphasizes the importance of each spoken word and the attention to each and every meeting. Rather than establishing a universal law, Buber emphasizes the importance of ambiguity and responsible response based on each particular context. While silence is important in constructing an experience, it is not understood as different from textuality, but as an essential part of it. Buber avoids explanations and strategically creates gaps as an element of this interaction. In fact, Buber's inner crisis was perpetuated by silence—his silence in the face of the young man's question—the rest of his life was about eliminating silence, which he equates with lack of meeting, of dialogue.

Differences and Contingency- Buber emphasizes the importance of differences through the gaps he introduces (in time, language, and worldviews) and the contingencies between things such as language and time. The differences between these elements are not cancelled, but a relation based on resemblance between them is nevertheless established. Related to the importance of differences is the understanding of time as nonlinear wherein relations between different times and ideas from different texts all reverberate in each other. The element of intertextuality and the way in which different elements are contingent on one another further establishes the importance of connections and the element of meeting.

The importance of duality is further constructed through the use of *Hassidic tales* and the presentation of the transformation as an *encounter* with people or events from his past.

Zen

The main rhetorical form that was identified for describing the awakening experience was the *rhetoric of suchness*. This form consists of the presentation of every single thing as it presents itself from moment to moment. The presentation of each moment as it is—*suchness*—is the expression of emptiness and is prevalent also in *haikus*. The rhetoric of ‘suchness’ is characterized by the presentation of moments without pointing to or producing another level of reality other than ‘what is.’ Suzuki explains that the goal is communicating the author’s genuine feelings with no artificial or intellectual scheme. In other words, there should be no “self” or ego involved in the writing and no mediation between the expression and the experience. The writer should become an instrument for expressing the inspiration.³ For this reason, the writers avoid terms that can be understood as having an independent origin and existence (such as “I”) and use *suchness*, and *thatness* instead. Due to its particular syntax, the actions of the haiku [and the awakening narratives] are described as arising and co-created rather than as created *by* someone. The brevity of the expression has nothing to do with the importance of the content which focuses on expressions with no mediation, thus conveying experiences while minimizing ontological concepts.

Nonsense is another important trope in the rhetoric of Zen, but here also the term was must be hedged since “nonsense” itself assumes a representational stance. ‘Katz’ and other seemingly nonsensical expressions and questions (such as ‘what is the sound of one hand clapping?’ and ‘what was your face before your parents were born’ as well as

³ Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*.

‘original mind’) enable the avoidance of ‘names’ or negation—no names. Nonsense is used to undo the habits of categorical and conventional thinking and create an experience of ‘suchness.’ At a later stage, nonsense becomes the expression of ‘suchness’ and is no longer understood as a tool. *Paradoxes* are also very popular in Zen and especially in Kōans. Similar to ‘nonsense,’ they were used as tools for preparation of the mind to the experience of sunyata but are also expressions of the non-dual nature of reality. In these cases, language is often used to provoke a crisis of meaning and to snap dependence on conventional thoughts, words and actions. This purpose is different from the spontaneous expressions of moments of satori or kensho.

Expressions is a term coined by Dōgen which I use in this dissertation to refer to actions which embody the realization of sunyata. It can also be called ‘performative rhetoric’ but I believe that the term *expressions* better maintain the elements of non-duality and *isness*. Expressions found in the testimonies included: ‘taking a bite of the apple,’ crying, laughing (often together), as well as gestures. Since those “expressions” typically include both verbal and nonverbal elements they pose an ironic situation—while these nonverbal elements might be able to “go beyond” language they are ephemeral; we only know about them if they were written about.

Temporality and Haunting

The different religions analyzed in this dissertation have different conceptions of time which in turn shaped their respective understanding of metaphysics and life. The notion of time is very complex and deserves a separate and richer research endeavor.

Nevertheless, temporality was acknowledged in this research in various ways that must be recognized and elaborated.

Judaism

Greco-European time is based on the solar movement and is understood to be “rectilinear,” as a linear line and a series of succession. In comparison, Hebrew time is based on the rhythmic alterations of the moon and is understood in terms of cycle rather than a linear line. The Hebrew language does not contain the differentiation to multiple tenses which exist in Indo-European languages and focuses on groups of verbs. Since time is understood as a ceaseless return of time content—and since the language emphasizes action—time is understood in terms of the quality of the events and each event is understood as a coherent whole at the same as it is related to all else.

In Greco-European thought, language is understood in terms of vision and space is the dominant mode of being; space operates like a vast container of life. For the Hebrews, however, time filled this role and consciousness was the container that held things together. The Hebrew present is therefore fluid and contains both past and future events. Multiple meanings can be derived from every action as every event reverberates and reference other events. The tension between presence and absence as it is experienced in time is expressed linguistically. The non-referential understanding of language and the ways in which groups of verbs and nouns are related to each other establish the notion that words do not point to an external source but rather to each other. Since the verb ‘to be’ does not exist, Hebrew does not focus on identities but on the contingency and connection between elements. Relations are constituted through

juxtaposition—something ‘is’ and ‘is not.’ All exists on the boundary of the same and the different. The movement is not towards the general and the universal, but towards differentiation and multiple meanings. The texts are therefore abrupt and each sentence refers back to other sentences, texts and events that have taken place at different times.

Handelman claims that in Judaism the tension between presence and absence is better expressed through voice than vision.⁴ While vision is a complete presence of a thing, sound is a moving vibration that is and is not there. Also, while vision corresponds better with space, voice seems to be more fleeting and appropriate for a metaphysics which is grounded in temporality. Stability is attained in voice through repetition and recognition of recurring patterns as they move and change. While the Greeks described what they saw and thought of language in terms of vision—likeness, the Hebrews were not interested in the photographic appearances of things and their representation as copies or images. The focus in Hebrew thought is on voice, interaction, and the reverberations of interactions over time. The element of conversation and dialogue is, as we’ve discussed above, central in Buber.

We can therefore see why Hebraic metaphysics and its linguistic system are more appropriate for the idiom of haunting as it is described by Jacques Derrida. The system maintains the problem of reference. Differance as both deferred and in time and as maintaining differences is embedded into the linguistic matrix. On the psychological level, this might mean the reverberations of past events into the present and the multiple

⁴ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, 20.

scenarios in which events could have taken place. This element of haunting was reflected in Buber's description of his dealing with his friend's death as well as in the language he chose to describe his experience. Buber was, literally, haunted by it later in his life; it infuses his life work.

Christianity

As was mentioned above, space and vision are the dominant forms of thinking in Greco-European thought, and time is understood as succession of events on an axis of time. Past events are not understood as continuously present and interrelated to each other but each event is followed by another. This is again the logic of substitution and replacement which can further explain why the morning following an awakening is understood as a completely new event which replaces the 'dark night of the soul' that preceded it. In spatial metaphysics which moves through time, the focus is on the series of events and the projection into the future.

Haunting on a linguistic and a psychological level exist differently here. Since the linguistic system maintains the possibility of reaching a transcendental signifier somewhere outside the text, haunting is not expressed through reverberations and alternatives but as a desire to go out of the text. The possibility of union with that remote ideal always haunts the texts and readers. At the same time, these concepts exist as eternal ideals that can never be fulfilled. Haunting operates here in a spatial manner—as something which hovers above the text—hence, the poetic longing for the ideals that can (but cannot) be obtained. The rhetorical and psychological solution for the problem is the

mediation of Jesus—the Word Made Flesh. The whole religion is haunted, and it is haunting.

This might explain the Western tendency to think of transformation as an event rather than a process, and can further explain the belief in a dramatic change that would terminate and constitute a different present instead. These linguistic and temporal systems can further feed into human desire for obtaining conclusive and perfect things—be it the ideal of love as perfection, or the possibility of transformation through consumerism. In the testimonies analyzed, the desire for change was experienced as immense suffering; the difficulties were experienced as impositions that must be dealt with. However, it was only through external interference in the image of Jesus that the crisis was ‘resolved.’

Zen

In the West, time is mostly understood as linear while impermanence is mostly understood as something outside of it, as a timeless being distinguished from the world. As we have seen, this view is influenced by the Socratic turn and the movement to the ideal forms—eternity as transcendence, as external time. Buddhism has a different understanding all together, which deconstructs the construction of time and infinity as opposites. Nagarjuna refutes both permanence and impermanence by demonstrating their interdependence: “All things are impermanent, which means that there is neither permanence nor impermanence.”⁵ The paradox is stated in the typical negative dialectics of Indian thought and deconstructs the duality between the terms. David Loy explains

⁵ Cited in: Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, 42.

that one way to understand the sentence is by affirming that there is nothing which does not change and this is nothing other than the flux of change itself. Rather than contradicting each other, the terms are actually related such that one implies the other.

Christianity understands the self as an independent being that is subject to time but always aspires to realize its true form by going *beyond* time. In Judaism, the self and the community are interrelated: time is understood as cyclical and is defined by the qualitative content of events which reverberate across time. Buddhism emphasizes the ways in which the construction of time and the construction of self are interdependent. I have related the linear understanding of time in Christianity to the solar calendar and the understanding of language as moving away from origins. Likewise, the self is experienced as an object which moves along a linear time. Buddhism acknowledges this tendency and explains that memory of past events and projection into the future creates the illusory sense of continuity *in* time which reifies into the sense-of-self. The projections of these temporal/causal sequences construct time as an objective and external 'thing.' A delusional bifurcation is therefore established between the time as a container and the things it contains. The distinction between the container and its content causes us to experience those things which exist in time as non-temporal and self-existing. Consequently, the sense-of-self is experienced as objective, as permanent and as self-existing. The objectification of time is therefore also the objectification of self which is experienced as autonomous and timeless while it is also trapped in time and subject to it.

Awakening entails realization that the sense-of-self is in fact in constant flux and does not exist as a stable and independent object. Since the sense-of-self is always experienced in time, the realization of the empty nature of the self also entails the realization of the emptiness of time. However, the deconstruction of the duality between things and time is difficult to express in words because of the structure of language. The Buddhist writings and the testimonies analyzed from the three pillars of Zen overcame this problem in a few ways.

Since the testimonies were written as journals, the passing of time framed the experiences. Time was therefore constructed as a container of the self and the experiences were shared from moment to moment. This awareness of the passing of time clashed with the desire shared by most of the narrators to find a permanent solution to their pain. The focus on pain juxtaposed with the flux of time therefore reflects the starting point in the Buddhist discussion on time: the desire for infinity versus the growing awareness of the ways in which time changes us.

The deconstruction of time through the experience of satori is expressed in a few different ways. The rhetoric of ‘suchness’ and the focus on the present moment as a whole which contains the past and future gets close to the heart of the matter. Since the rhetoric of ‘suchness’ makes no use of personally identified writing, there is no separation between objective things and objective time; there are only events which function as a coherent whole. The narrators also made use of the Dōgen style of writing by conflating the subject and predicates in terms such as *being-time*. Here again, there is no objective self or an objective time but merely the *expression* of the two.

In other cases, the narrators expressed the realization that time disappeared, that it has become everything and nothing. Loy explains that without the reflexivity of a fixed self to measure it, the moment expands to become everything (or nothing). The time—which was itself constructed—is no longer experienced as an objective past and future and the present itself (as well subjectivity) are no longer experienced as objective things.⁶

Although both Zen and Judaism acknowledge the interdependence of all things and do not consider time linear, there are important differences in the worldviews and rhetoric of these traditions as they relate to time and haunting. Buddhism radicalizes the process of deconstruction by pointing to the essentially empty nature of the self. While Judaism uses gerunds, conditions, and has the element of difference embedded in the religious hermeneutics, Zen rather challenges our very experience of being haunted, revealing it to be empty, impermanent, non-self, and the source of unnecessary suffering. Rather than explaining time as the reverberations of past events upon the consciousness, the rhetoric of ‘suchness’ focuses on being in the present with no reverberations.

The different types of haunting correspond with different types of aesthetics of ‘ineffability’ or imperfection (as I referred to them in the second chapter.) Judaism relishes in the play of differences, juxtapositions and contingencies across different texts and times. Since texts are never understood as complete, the aesthetic pleasure is derived from the endless possibilities of interpretations and readings of texts. In Christian thought, as we have noted, the differences are not tolerated and the pleasure of ambiguity is the pleasure of finding the correct form. It consists of unveiling the mystery and

⁶ Ibid., 42-47.

answering the question: ‘what hides behind the half-open door’? In Zen, it is the pleasure of the ordinary, of things as they are. This is exemplified in the haikus and the pedestrian beauty of ‘wabi sabi.’

Subjectivity, the Real and Awakening

The notion of subjectivity is essential to awakening and the challenge of expression. The self, itself, is impossible to capture in words and the experience of awakening entails not only a growing awareness of that sense-of-self but also a change in the way the self is understood and experienced. The metaphor of awakening is therefore central to most traditions as it divides life into the previous dream or illusion and the new and ‘real’ understanding. Indeed, Charles Finney, Thomas Merton, and many Zen testimonies have described an experience in which they felt ‘real.’ In this section I summarize the understanding of subjectivity and awakening in the respective traditions and tie these understandings to the rhetoric found in the testimonies.

Judaism

In Judaism, there is not much emphasis on the self as an individual subject but the identity and role of the individual is interrelated with the role it plays in the community. On the one hand, there is no room for personal salvation in Judaism since the salvation of the Jewish people is a collective, nationalist one. This is reflected in myriad writings including the Kabbalist notion of the breaking of the vessels and the focus on the interconnectedness of all beings. At the same time, tshuva refers to a personal change of heart and life style. An important Jewish proverb asserts: ‘anyone who has saved a soul in

Israel, its as if they have saved the entire world.⁷ Each and every one is thus given importance as an essential part of the fabric of the people. In the same way that each word sustains reality and is reflected by it, each person is considered a vital component in the matrix of humanity. Levinas explains that the Hebraic tradition differs from the Hellenic one in claiming that God, as absolutely Other, can be encountered only through the ethical relationship with other human beings. He claims that Biblical and Talmudic texts teach us that subjectivity does not begin in an autonomous self-presence but in interaction with the ultimately other for which we remain forever responsible.⁸ Awakening in Judaism and in Buber can thus be read as a growing commitment to respond to the call of the other. Subjectivity is created in them not as a solitary presence but as ultimately interconnected; the self arises in the response to the call of the other.

The understanding of language already discloses an intertextual orientation. In Jewish exegesis, much attention is given to each element of the language: the alphabet, punctuation, the spaces between the words and characters, the syntax and the connection between different sections of the text. Each element of language has creative power and is considered to be a self sustained whole. However, all elements of language are also interrelated and therefore maintain and create one another. Thus, language is holographic

Buber's awakening reflects the attention to details and particularities of the text and people. His awakening reflects not a personal and isolated transformation, but a transition from what he perceived as solipsistic mysticism to being *in* the world in

⁷ My translation

⁸ Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers : The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida.*

relational dialogue. In contrast to his pantheistic mysticism, dialogue is grounded in a belief in a theistic, personal God whose active relation to man does not obscure the ontological or “primal” distance between *I and Thou*.⁹ After his awakening, Buber does not express longing for the unity and the fusion of individual personality and describes mysticism itself in dialogic terms. While Buber’s sense of self did not drop, the focus moved to meetings and the establishment of ethical *I-Thou* relationships: each must be met and be given an appropriate response. Buber himself establishes the relation between subjectivity and language in his testimonies. The concept of tshuva (which Buber chose as a title for one of the chapters) is a case in point. The concept of tshuva refers to both ‘to answer’ and also ‘to return.’ In that chapter the physical action of answering or speaking facilitate a meaningful change. Especially since the chapter discusses the First World War and since Buber emphasizes the gaps between both his thoughts and between the question and answer, dialogue for him is not equal to similarities and security. Dialogue does not necessitate the reduction of the other to the category of the same, and subjectivity depends on the ability to live with differences and ambiguity.

Christianity

I have explained the relations between a mimetic view of language and the understating of subjectivity. Words were taken to be signs which point to an original presence and the goal of western metaphysics has become locating these origins and their distinct identities. Since the possibility of origins assumes a corresponding progression towards one’s telos, awakening is understood as an expression of the potentiality to

⁹ Buber, *I and Thou*.

transform. Awakening therefore entails a movement from the mortal and ephemeral towards the transcendental signifier, the original presence beyond the text. One no longer identifies with the ephemeral body but realizes the real and infinite substance of life in Christ. The change, I have noted, is based on substitution and replacement and awakening entails a new relation to the world which replaces the old one. Although the change is modeled after that of Christ and is described in the images of death and rebirth, the subject is in fact reaffirmed. The subjective realization of identity does not drop but is transfigured by identifying with the 'real' source of life. Subjectivity in this tradition therefore refers to an individual, distinct, and independent subject.

This understanding of subjectivity is reflected in the breadth and length with which those awakened describe their emotional turmoil. Saint Augustine describes his inner conflicts and the dramatic intervention with clarity unparalleled in the Jewish tradition, thereby setting a pattern for personal confessions for years to come. Although the focus is on the individual awakening, the personal change is always the result of a divine act of grace and is framed as a universal solution to a universal problem. While one rises in Christ, the same solution can and should be applied to all humanity.

The archetype of the hero's journey described in the first chapter is in line with the Christian understanding of awakening and subjectivity more than with the Jewish or Buddhist one. This pattern is reflected in the division of life to an old and new one and in the construction of change as a response to a call. Moreover, the focus on suffering as an essential stage in the purging of the soul and the forming of subjectivity is central in this tradition. While pain was an incentive for change both in Buber and in other Zen

testimonies, in Christianity that suffering is constructed as an essential stage in the movement towards a new life and a coherent sense-of-self.

Thomas Merton expresses in his later writings different ideas. Perhaps he was influenced by changes towards a constitutive understanding of language in the West, or perhaps his exposure to Eastern texts contributed to his non-dual rhetoric. Perhaps his practice deepened and had become less dualistic. Whatever the reason might be, Merton's later writings chide his previous desire for an ultimate conversion which would end his agonies as "immature." Merton declares that he let go of his desire for perfection and warns the readers against expectations and cautions them that pursuing a life of contemplation might not yield the dramatic change they might aspire to experience. While an understanding of awakening as a dramatic process that is grounded in subjectivity and based on replacement is practiced in Pentecostal Christianity, I believe that in Merton we see a transition towards a more global understanding of awakening that is influenced by various traditions.

Zen

In Buddhism, the self is taken to be a thought construction and therefore a delusion. The only thing that can be experienced is constant change. Since identification with the illusory sense-of-self is a cause for much *dukkah* (misery), the Buddhist tradition ends this identification by realizing that the sense-of-self is a mental construction. In Loy's interpretation of Buddhism, our greatest fear is not the fear of death, but the fear that we are not real. For this reason, the-sense-of-self desires to objectify itself and to become autonomous. The self tries to become *real* by trying to become something, to fill

a perceived lack. The sense-of-self which arises is therefore always shadowed by a sense of lack which it tries to escape, a feeling that “there is something wrong with me.” That sense-of-self is delusional, for in the effort to become real it confuses the things grasped for as objective and real things. The effort to ontologize oneself is projected into “heavily symbolized/becoming real projects.”¹⁰

Zen rhetoric, we saw, targets exactly this insecurity by pulling the rug out from beneath one’s feet. One is forced to become aware of the empty nature of self by interrogating questions such as: “who am I?”, “who is the one who answered?” and “what was your face before your parents were born?” By becoming intimate with these questions, awareness of the lack of origins and the impossibility of a stable identity (such as a self) develops. The kōans expose the ways in which language reifies things; it deconstructs the mind at a vulnerable point in time and prepares it for the experience of sunyata. The technical language of the *Abhidharma* details the ways in which things arise but avoids pronouns, thereby avoiding language’s tendency to construct illusionary identities.

Central to human experience and the effort to evoke and preserve the sense-of-self as alive is to avoid the sense-of-self as dead. The basic dualism between life and death is also deconstructed in Buddhism. The middle way between the extremes of transcendence—the belief that the self survives death and the counter belief of annihilation according to which the self is destroyed at death—is the realization of

¹⁰ Loy, *Lack and Transcendence : The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, 16.

anatman (no-self) or *sunyata*. Common terms addressing this non-duality mentioned in the analysis chapter were the unborn, the uncreated, unproduced.

There is, O monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an unconditioned; if O, monks, there were not here this unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, there would here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the conditioned.

But because there is an unborn...therefore there is an escape from the born...¹¹

I have already noted the ways in which Indian thought which opted for negative dialectics did not resonate with the Chinese and Japanese. Dōgen therefore uses affirmative sentences rather than negative dialectics to convey the same idea and deconstruct the duality of life and death:

Just understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. There is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided; there is nothing such as nirvana to be sought. Only when you realize this are you free from birth and death.

It is a mistake to suppose that birth turns into death. Birth is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, in Buddha-dharma birth is understood as no-birth. Death is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, death is understood as no-death.

In birth there is nothing but birth and in death there is nothing but death. Accordingly, when birth comes, face and actualize birth, and when death comes, face and actualize death. Do not avoid them or desire them.¹²

Cited in: ¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 25.

Dōgen's non-metaphysical and rhetorical/metaphorical solution is affirmation of both terms. When life and death are not experienced as opposites they will not paralyze the way one lives one's life. In awakening, therefore, the illusory sense-of-self drops in a process that is described as the death of the ego, and referred to through metaphors of death and rebirth or awakening from the illusion that is the dream. The important realization, therefore, is that in the collapse into no-thing-ness, a realization that nothing was ever lacking also arises. Awakening thus entails the freedom from the subjective need to realize oneself. The duality between self and world is also deconstructed and all that is left is the present moment and the ability to appropriately respond to situations.

Importantly, references to death and rebirth in the testimonies were still interpreted by the teachers as preliminary levels of awakening for they still maintained duality and more importantly, the vestige of self, as the one who "died" and who was reborn. The deconstruction of this duality has been understood as an expression of a higher level of realization. Some narrators described their frustration of feeling that life was like a dream while they wanted "to reach the real and *be* it." The frustration expressed in the testimonies is what Loy describes as the feeling of lack and the need to 'realize' oneself which shadows the sense-of-self. Once those narrators were awakened, they expressed feelings of joy and described reality and themselves as perfect and lacking nothing. The feeling described is not perfection which exists ontologically and is contrasted to imperfection. Perfection is constructed here as the dropping of the desire to become real and the realization that even the sense of lack was a mental construction. The myriad descriptions of non-duality express the same realization of sunyata and the empty

nature of the self, which is otherwise experienced as autonomous and the individual self is now understood as connected to all else.

The ways in which the awakening experiences are typically constructed as arising out of the interaction between the master and student—and, in turn, interactions with the entire surrounding—further deconstruct the belief in an autonomous self. Awakening is not constructed as something one undergoes but an experience which arises. This rhetorical move is also in accord with Buber’s emphasis on meetings and the importance of truly listening and entering the gaps of time and the gaps between people. Interestingly, these methods are in agreement with current findings in cognitive psychology detailed in the second chapter. According to these studies, consciousness is always embodied, enfolded in the world, and intersubjective.¹³ Consciousness is not closed in a mind that is separate from the body and the world. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether consciousness is ‘outside’ or ‘inside.’ Consciousness is both individual and ecological, it is a public affair and it always co-arises with everything else.

Expression and Experience

The traditions explored in this dissertation approach language, silence and ineffability in different ways. Judaism emphasizes the contextual and creative capacities of language wherein silence is viewed as an integral part of the linguistic process. When operating from within the mimetic model of language, Christianity contrasts silence to speech and emphasizes the ineffability of consciousness and silence as signs of union for

¹³ Varela, "Steps to a Science of Inter-Being: Unfolding the Dharma Implicit in Cognitive Science.", Francisco J. Varela and Jonathan. Shear, *The View from Within : First-Person Approaches to the Study of Consciousness* (Thorverton, UK ; Bowling Green, OH: Imprint Academic, 2000).

the divine or at least inviting the divine. Zen also emphasizes silent practice but Dōgen and other masters do not view silence and ineffability as in conflict to speech. Language is to be used with caution in order to deconstruct rather than construct the illusionary belief in individual and separate identities. Silence, speech, and gestures are all valued as relevant expressions. The realization of sunyata entails the dropping of ego that is constructed with language to begin with, but to say that the realization is beyond words remains dualistic and it is therefore described as both beyond words and as all words. However, although the different traditions address silence and ineffability differently, none of them dismisses silence as irrelevant.

A dialectics of silence and speech was found in all the testimonies analyzed. An interaction with a friend or a teacher often enticed a silent reflection and a realization that was tacitly experienced. This was often followed by further interaction (with a friend, teacher, etc.) which shaped the conceptual understanding and deepened the realization. Regardless of the tradition, accounts of awakening (whether they refer to a small or a dramatic shift in a way of life) reflect movement between silence and speech. John Welwood claims that each act of articulation demystifies the cloud out of which the initial sensations arose. Speech therefore has a transformative effect when it resonates with the feelings, thus allowing them to unfold. According to this approach, formulating the ineffable feelings in language plays an essential role in waking up and transforming.¹⁴ Additionally, in her study of intuitive experience, Petitman-Peugeot noticed that the

¹⁴ Welwood, *Awakening the Heart : East/West Approaches to Psychotherapy and the Healing Relationship*, 92-95.

recollection of intuitive experiences required periods of silence. Intuitive experience in the production of knowledge often arises spontaneously and similarly to awakening experiences, there is no sense-of-self involved but merely being in 'flow.' Recollections of the specifics of the experience are therefore hard to access. To overcome the problem, the researcher used targeted questions regarding the particularities of the context in which the experiences took place. Moments of silence were indication that the subject is not using a script but is accessing, his or her "pre-thought."¹⁵ The movement between silence and speech is therefore important when accessing information and bringing it to the level of conscious awareness. In the testimonies it was often the interaction with an accomplished teacher or spiritual friend that evokes a sense of lack, that inspires one to energetically overcome it. This in turn provokes an egoic crisis and the "breaking open" that results from that crisis.

This finding supports Varela's claim that an experience is not *beyond* words but is *prelinguistic*. The sensory process moves through the spinal cord to the limbic system, and onto the superior cortex. The momentary arising of a mental state therefore always stems from affect; what we call 'reason' is the last stage in the process. Conceptual thinking is the final step in the progression which arises from affect. Since the experience of oneself as a subject arises out of the use of language, the tacit experience happens before any awareness of an 'I' who knows what had happened. Ineffability is therefore not transcendence but a preliminary stage in a process of realization.

¹⁵ Petitmengin-Peugeot, "The Intuitive Experience," 46.

In light of this finding, the relevance of ‘ineffability’ as a concept must be questioned. There is perhaps nothing beyond language but merely moments of pure awareness that are later *reified* through language use. What we call cognition, Varela reminds us, is what emerges from being in the world. Cognition is not something which exists but is inactively embodied and inactively emergent based on the inputs received. In other words, cognition is imagination and fantasy. These findings conflict with the mirror metaphor and the mimetic model of language, as language not merely describes but co-participates in the creation of the self and the world it inhabits.

Katz provides the paradigmatic claim for the constitutive model of language in religious studies. For him, the respective rhetorical traditions are the ones shaping particular mystical experiences. The Buddhist scriptures shape the mind and prepare it for the experience of sunyata while the Christian texts prepare it for meeting Christ the lover.¹⁶ However, this view is also too limited. Important similarities were found in awakenings of the traditions studied: new experience of subjectivity and responsibility for others, joy, and a sense of encountering the real were found in all cases. These elements had similar natures but were described in diverse ways based on the hermeneutic tradition. For example, in his phrasing of the different orientation to time, Buber emphasizes the gaps between moments—therefore highlighting the differences and gaps between things that are experienced as distinct but are nevertheless interrelated. St. Augustine emphasizes transcendence of temporality and entering into an infinite realm

¹⁶ Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Language."

while Buddhists used a more non-dual language according to which time is everything and nothing.

Both the similar and the different elements of the experience and the respective rhetorical traditions should not be subsumed by the other. We should be cautious of formulating a universal rhetoric according to which awakening and ineffability are always the same but merely described in different ways. Similarly, the similar components of the experience should not be overlooked. The entire history of Western metaphysics has striven to reduce what Derrida calls 'the trace,' but determining that language is the cause and the force constituting the experience falls into the same ideological trap by tracing relations in terms of origins and ends. Some writers ardently claim that different rhetoric is applied to describe an experience that is essentially similar. However, according to Katz, the rhetorical traditions also shaped different experiences of awakening, subjectivity and time. Expression and experience therefore do not exist as distinct 'things' that are linked together in a causal relation, but they co-arise and co-create one another. As Bakhtin claims, language is not only shaped by historical, social, economic and religious factors, but in return also affects them, weaving a dynamic and interdependent constellation. Since language is inherently dialogic and perpetually changes, it cannot be grasped as a unitary and closed system, and instead can be understood only in terms of its relationship to the multiple forces that it is in relationship with.¹⁷

¹⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

Implications

One of the most profound implications of this study is that the study of ineffability is of extreme importance to the field of rhetoric which has traditionally been occupied with problems of public address and assumed a stable and independent agency. The detailed analysis of ineffability and awakening shed light on the problem of subjectivity and showcases the self as intersubjective and as co-arising in the *shared* movement from silence to speech. This study further shows that any discussion of language must always already assume embodiment and a particular temporality. These, however, are hardly ever acknowledged to illuminate the ways in which messages are being conveyed and selves are being formed. This study therefore requires reconsideration of questions of agency and the ways in which we have come to view public address. It also complicates problems of ethics as the problem of the other becomes more acutely than ever a question of mediation.

This section of the discussion begins with the observation that the topoi of ineffability and silence are loaded with ideological meaning. While a claim for ineffability can be used as an adjective for describing a moment of tacit awareness, it has also been constructed as an ontological thing that like the 'sublime' supersedes the normal order of reality. Since different orientations serve different political and religious purposes and stem from different worldviews, rhetoricians must take into account the different aspects of ineffability and silence. The construction of ineffability should therefore be approached from an intercultural perspective.

The implications of these findings go beyond religious studies. Moments of ineffability are acknowledged not only in the context of religious experience and the politics of ineffability described above might spill into these other areas. If ineffability is venerated in one religious tradition, this might yield a similar orientation when dealing with other ineffable moments such as trauma. In other words, it is likely that in cultures which are conditioned to long for ineffability as some ontological and superior construct, ineffable moments of trauma, or love, would be homologically imbued with poetic significance. On the other hand, in cultures prepared for the experience of ineffability, or which do not emphasize it all, ineffable moments of trauma (or love, etc.) might be constructed and dealt with differently.

The different models of awakening in the context of religion might also yield different models of transformation in a more general sense. It is possible, for example, that in a Western culture which expects dramatic and finite change, people would expect similar results when dealing with health and emotional crises. Since time is understood as linear in these cultures, one is oriented towards the future in expectation of future events to annihilate past impressions. In Jewish culture, in which each moment is viewed as a full event which contains reverberations from the past, a traumatic experience such as the holocaust or the destruction of the Holy Temple create a wound that is always present in the collective consciousness and nationalist identity, but the coping mechanisms and expectations for change are different.

This dissertation also revealed interesting parallels between the rhetoric of post-structuralism, Judaism, and Buddhism. Susan Handelman explicates the relations

between rabbinic exegesis, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis;¹⁸ and David Loy had pointed to the similarities between deconstruction and Buddhism.¹⁹ Some interesting parallels between Jewish and Tibetan rhetoric were also observed by Kamenetz ²⁰ (e.g., Judaism and Tibetan Buddhism are the only religions to have argumentation as an official part of the religious training.) Linzer was interested in the sociological phenomenon of the “Jubu”—the ubiquity of Jewish people who practice Buddhism.²¹ However, in spite of the above examples, the rhetorical structure at the basis of them was not studied in length. Moreover, in spite of the immense richness of both Jewish and Buddhist hermeneutics, relatively little attention has been given to them in rhetorical studies. More in depth study of these rhetorical traditions might shed light on post-structural rhetoric, and also enrich the field of rhetorical studies that has traditionally been more occupied with Western-Christian rhetoric.

A last observation concerns the concept of ‘global religion’ used in various places throughout this research. Due to changes in means of transportation and communication systems—and the turning of the world into a global village—mutual influence of religions on one another has accelerated in recent years. Much like art and material commodities, an unparalleled variety of religions is currently available to most people in most places. Over fifty years ago, both Thomas Merton and Martin Buber studied Eastern

¹⁸ Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses : The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*.

¹⁹ Loy, "The Deconstruction of Buddhism."

²⁰ Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus : A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

²¹ Judith Linzer, *Torah and Dharma : Jewish Seekers in Eastern Religions* (Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson, 1996).

religions in addition to their practice of Catholicism and Judaism. The exposure to these traditions has shaped their writings and created an interesting hybrid that has in turn become available to millions of readers world-wide. Today, the exposure of individuals to the myriad of philosophical traditions has significantly increased, resulting in what I suspect is a new and intertextual discourse that freely borrows from different religions. This area of research had only been hinted upon in this dissertation but is nevertheless full of opportunities. As the differences between cultures should be acknowledged, so also should the new discourse that is influenced by all of them and creates a new rhetorical and sociological climate.

The study of ineffability is therefore inherently interdisciplinary and requires reconsideration of some of the most basic assumptions in regard language, temporality, subjectivity, public consciousness and public address. Inquiry at the gap between language to silence forces us to deal with problems of identity, of presence in absence, and even what forms our cultural understanding of trauma and, aesthetics. The table in the following page summarizes the observations made in this research.

Table 1- Summary of Findings

Awakening testimonies in:	Judaism (Buber)	Christianity	Zen
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructive and descriptive -Sacred; -Performative - Davar- functions as both a word and a thing; words are not indexing of things outside but creating and sustaining them. -God is a unity at the basis of things but not as a being, <i>res</i>. -Language is divinely verbal and there is no need to transcend it. - The letters, their punctuation, the gaps are considered to have creative and ontological power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Descriptive -Mimetic -Word-onoma- name. Arbitrary connection between words and things. -Expectation for balance and accuracy in representation. -Visual bias in understanding of language (likeness, image). -The movement is from a word to a thing to divine silence. -Hierarchy- spoken words are superior to written words, silence is superior to spoken language. -The desire movement is beyond the text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constructive Language by nature constructs distinct identities while everything is interconnected, ever changing and lacks an independent existence. - Used strategically to construct the realization of sunyata in texts such as the <i>Abhidharma</i> and <i>kōans</i> -Dōgen: the symbol is to be realized as an expression of the symbolized. - The sutras, words, letters and silence rare given positive significance as embodiments of the end. -Every act and gestures can be considered ‘expressions’
Metaphysics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dominant idiom- metonymy, reality is intertextual. -Focus on particulars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominant trope— allegory and typology. -Textuality is associated with temporality, the body, human, sin. Ineffability is associated with the divine, silence, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sunyata -The dominant form—changed from negative dialectics in Indian thought to kataphatic statements and paradoxes to

Table 1-continued.

		infinity, the soul. -Attempt to find universal laws.	convey the nondual truth of sunyata,
Origins & identities	-‘As if’ instead of ‘is’; juxtapositions. Everything could have been otherwise. -Focus on intertextuality	-Origins which can be located outside the text. -Belief in progress from origin to fruition.	-Dependent origination
Ineffability	-Does not exist as a concept or practice. -Divinity is ineffable but not as <i>res</i> .	-Exist as a concept and an ideal. -Constructed as spatial and as ontological.	-Focus on experience, but the notion of ineffable is to be caught by negation. - Experience is all words and none of them.
Dominant form	-Time, history	-Space	
Sense	-Auditory	-Visual	
temporality	-Reverberations of past and future into the present. - Everything is interconnected. -Time is understood not in terms of the qualitative content of the events.	-Linear	-Time is constructed and functions as background against which the sense of self is refied. However, time is essentially empty.
Awakening	-Tshuva- -Realization of unity; focus on conduct and action in the world.	-Conversion- -Modeled after Jesus. -Focus on faith. -Replacement- division between old and new life. -Movement from suffering to love. -A personal action in response to a divine call. -Transfiguration. -Retrospect gaze, predicting signs of the upcoming conversion.	-Satori- realization of sunyata-nonsel and the empty nature of reality.

Table 1-continued.

Subjectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Self and the Collective are intertwined. -There is no emphasis on emotionally inclined an confessional writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Belief in an individual subject. -The mediation of Jesus and the grace of God are necessary for change. -Focus on emotionally inclined writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dependent origination. An Individual Self is a linguistic construction. -No Focus on self expression.
Haunting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Of past events into the present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The transcendental signifier. -A possibility of perfection exists outside the normal order of reality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In awakening there is no haunting but pure presence of what is.
Construction of the Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Performative silence -Dialogue -Focus on particular words, people, and actions. -Contingency- relations between different texts, events, texts, and times. -Dialogue -Embodiment -Haunting -Metaphors function not only on the level of words- love, bridge. -Negative dialectics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Praise of silence, -Performative silence. -Claims of ineffability. -Symbol: white, light, silence. -Metaphors: death, rebirth, water, unknowing, awakening, blindness, dark night, and morning. -Real vs. illusion. All that is beyond— ineffability, miracles. -Imitation and replacement – modeling the awakening after Jesus, suggest ineffability similar to his. -Allegory -Typology -Physical description -To some extent— paradoxes and negative dialectics. -Abstract terms—mercy, love. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rhetoric of Suchness: the presentation everyday events with no extra words; Rather than use of language as pointing to origins, no use of I and focus of the thusness. ‘isness. -Technical language (awakening arises) -Paradoxes -Nonsense -Non-dual- double negation (everything that is also is not). -Metaphors: death, rebirth (but not in terms of one substituting the other), ox, fish, water, original self, unknowing, awakening.

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 רבי צדוק הכהן מלובלין. צדקת הצדיק. אות ק' loV

VITA

Sharon Avital was born and raised in Israel. She received her Bachelor degree B.A in 1999 and continued her graduate work immediately after. In 2001 she graduated from Bar-Ilan University with Masters in Social Psychology. Her Masters' thesis looked at the relationship between yoga practice, nonverbal sensitivity and emotional intelligence. In the fall of 2004 Sharon came to Austin in order to pursue her doctoral Studies in the rhetoric division of the Communication Studies department. Sharon's studies the intersections of continental philosophy, religious rhetoric, pop-culture, and consciousness studies.

Permanent address (or email): avitalsharon@yahoo.com

This dissertation was typed by the author.