

| Translation |



Translators' preface

An introduction to “Crisis of presence and religious reintegration” by Ernesto de Martino

Tobia FARNETTI, *University College London*

Charles STEWART, *University College London*

Ernesto de Martino's body of work includes several books on magic (e.g., 1947, 1959), an impressive historical and comparative anthropological study of funeral lamentation (1958), and an ethnography of a South Italian spirit possession cult elaborated around the bite of the tarantula and involving the performance of the *tarantella*, a style of music and dance that became popular throughout Italy (1961; Lüdtke 2008). At the time of his death in 1965, at the age of fifty-seven, he was working on a study of apocalyptic movements, published posthumously with the title *La fine del mondo* (1977). Collections of his shorter writings have appeared in Italy, as have publications of his fieldnotes, correspondence, and even his reading notes (2005a). Few of these works have been translated, which is part of the reason why de Martino is not so well known in the English-speaking world. Perhaps the recent translation of his monograph on “tarantism,” *The land of remorse* (2005b), and the appearance of the first book-length study in English of his thought (Ferrari 2012), will initiate a new appreciation. To these efforts we now add de Martino's account of one of his central and enduring ideas, the “crisis of presence.”

De Martino's publications combine social scientific methods and interrogatives with deep humanistic learning in philosophy, history, and literature. He illustrates his arguments about the “crisis of presence,” for example, with materials drawn from Greek tragedy, the Icelandic *Poetic Edda*, and ethnographic reports from Australia. Therein lies a great deal of de Martino's appeal and power to inspire. What has impeded the easy transfer of his ideas into English, however, is his assumption that readers comprehend the philosophy of his mentor, Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), and are familiar with Italian debates of the 1940s. Even if we mastered Croce's thought—which we do not—there is not space here to explicate his complex philosophy of history properly. We can only indicate briefly that Croce insisted on presentism, the idea, in Collingwood's words (1946: 202), that “all history is contemporary history.” History depends on the activation of the past in a present mind, in relation to contemporary concepts and interests. Historicity,

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for Croce, was human becoming according to the transcendental categories of aesthetics, logic, ethics, and economics. Hurricanes and earthquakes do not make history; people's conceptions of such phenomena, and responses to them, do. The natural world does not possess the consciousness and reflectivity necessary to qualify as participating in history. Unfortunately, and embarrassingly from the point of view of anthropology, Croce also excluded "primitive" humans from history, as they did not respond to life rationally, but through resort to magic. In the article translated here, de Martino can be seen still struggling with his mentor's ideas after his death. Although stating that "Croce was correct," he nonetheless rejects Croce's divide (*taglio*) between the human and non-human, but modifies the concept of the "divide" to apply to the internal risk within *all* humans. This is the threatening divide between presence and the loss of presence provoked by moments of crisis, which negate culture and thus humanity.

De Martino's grounding in Croce's philosophy gives his article an unusual orientation and a perplexing vocabulary. This vocabulary may well alienate prospective readers, yet it actually produces striking formulations such as "the crisis of presence," which offers a deep anthropological perspective on precarity (Saunders 1995). Another novel formulation is de Martino's idea that in the crisis of presence individuals experience "dehistorification." Since everything is historical, losing presence—being cut off from the synthesizing process of historical becoming—is equivalent to losing history, or losing society. The anguish accompanying the loss of presence may begin to be managed by an even greater removal from history through rituals that place one in a timeless metahistory; what Eliade termed "*illo tempore*," the time before time—archetypal time. Like cauterizing a wound, the resort to ritual (or "religious reintegration") exaggerates the initial crisis on the way to healing it. An unfortunate individual falling out of history is conscripted, through ritual, into a larger step out of history, which reopens the person to values, and enables the reacquisition of everyday historicity.

De Martino wrote this article in 1956 and at moments it sets off functionalist warning bells. He seems to fall into the trap of asserting that individuals mechanistically restore themselves to the *status quo ante* of sanity by resort to rituals established precisely for this purpose. Yet, de Martino thinks within a historicist paradigm, which assumes dynamism rather than homeostasis. Crises arise from the stagnation and fixation of that dynamic power that ordinarily propels the individual toward the future. Such moments arise unpredictably, symptoms of the human condition, which Heidegger described as "thrownness." The crisis of presence is a momentary failure of the Hegelian synthesis according to which the givens of the past and the present *should* become something novel in the future. Reintegration is not a return to a stable cultural norm, but an exercise in creative, even revolutionary, power akin to the invention of culture described by Wagner (1981). Rather than functionalism, de Martino's work bears the influences of phenomenology and existentialism, schools of thought that long remained outside the anthropological purview, but which have begun to be embraced in the last two decades. The field of anthropology has thus moved in de Martino's direction and it may well be that nearly a half century after his death we are in a better position to understand what he was saying.

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Tobia FARNETTI is a PhD student in the Department of Anthropology, University College London.

Charles STEWART is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology, University College London.

| Translation |



Crisis of presence and religious reintegration

Ernesto DE MARTINO

*Translated from the Italian by
Tobia Farnetti and Charles Stewart*

The second chapter of my book *Il mondo magico* (1947) contained the sketch of a general theory of magic as a demarcated historical world. Yet it also offered something more: an attempt to rethink and test Benedetto Croce's historicism on historiographic¹ forms of experience which lay outside his scope, namely the history of magical and religious life in so-called primitive cultures. Since then, as happens so often, new ideas have occurred, and above all, new and more contextually detailed historiographic materials have come to light, and these have both modified and corroborated that first sketch. It therefore seems an opportune moment to return to that discussion at the point where it was abandoned.

The fundamental thesis of *Il mondo magico*—which in truth far exceeded the historical field of “magic” on which it made its first steps—is *the crisis of presence*, to which magical practices would offer cultural resolution. But in the formulation of ten years ago this concept of presence remained tangled in a serious contradiction—at least insofar as it pretended to assert itself as a concept of a precatatorial unity of the person. The conquest of this unity would have constituted the dominant problem of the “epoch” of magic. This contradiction did not escape Croce who, in his essay, “Intorno al magismo come età storica” (1949) [“On magism as historical epoch”] observed:

On the other hand, De Martino emphasizes the risk of losing oneself, a risk that threatens the acquired unity of the spirit as well as its special forms. These forms defend themselves against that risk, that is, they continuously overcome the negative moment of error, evil, the brutal, into the positive moment of truth, beauty, the good, and so on. To emphasize this would in effect separate the unity of the spirit from its forms with an impossible divide. The forms of the spirit are not added onto that unity, but they are the unity itself, and thus trying to consider

1. Since any given culture is the result of historical coming into being, its study was defined as historicism by Croce. “Historiography” for de Martino here is equivalent to “ethnography.” This usage, repeated in the last paragraph of the article, reveals de Martino's thoroughgoing historicism.—Trans.

those in themselves would leave that unity worse than inert, empty. The age of magic, then, could not create the unity of the spirit because, like all the other ages that we like to carve out of the unique and continuous course of history, the age of magic was the action of that unity, and its categories. (1949: 202)

With different emphasis Enzo Paci writes:

In fact, talk of a drama which, through risk, constructs a vision of the world means to consider all of the categories and the forms. If humans were exclusively part of nature they would not exist, because they would not feel threatened by demise into nothingness, losing the constitutive human relationship—the relation between practice and theory; economics and moral law; between acting and knowing; between action and conscience. The ever-threatening barbarity, Vico's Lernaean Hydra, is really the loss of the categories that constitute humans in their historicity. Nature becomes, then, just as in the magical world, diabolical; disintegrator of humans and their historical civilization, which, as Vico observed, loses its laws, its moral as well as juridical form. (1950: 26)

Critique of this sort is compelling even if—as I have just shown—Croce and Paci present it with different emphases. Croce was correct: the “divide” (*il taglio*) within human history is “impossible” insofar as one could never think of a unity in itself that forms a particular—or even dominant—historical problem; a unity unconcerned with how and from what it became unity, and which resolution it shares in.²

Human civilization and history are always reborn—today as in whatever more remote or archaic “then”—and thus they will be born in the future until the word “man” makes sense by virtue of the power of categorization according to determinate forms or values. Furthermore, cultural presence, that is, being-in-history (*l'esserci nella storia*), remains defined precisely by this categorizing energy. Nevertheless, within human history, the risk of a divide exists as madness shows. At the limits of madness stand exactly that inertia and void—the inertia and void of values; presence lost, as Croce noted. Since the relationship that establishes presence is the same relationship that makes culture possible, the risk of human history not existing takes shape as the risk of losing culture and receding without mitigation into nature. When such a risk rises up in a specific “critical” moment of historical existence, presence loses the power consciously to define it or overcome it, and it gets tangled up, entering into a profound existential contradiction with itself. Then presence enters into crisis precisely as presence, since its reality lies entirely in the act of defining or overcoming, according to values, the situations of its own history (this and nothing else is permissible to understand when one speaks of human *ex-sistere*).³ A radical risk arises then, a risk that is certainly not the loss of the mythical prior unity of the categories, but more the loss of the dynamic unity of the categories; the extinguishing of that energy of categorization according to

2. An allusion to Hegel's dialectic, de Martino here conceptualizes the unity of the human being itself as the result of a synthesis between opposing forces.—Trans.

3. The word “exist,” from the Latin roots *ex-*, “out” and *sistere*, “to stand,” etymologically means “to stand forth, emerge.”—Trans.

values, which constitutes the reality itself of being-in-human-history—as Paci rightly pointed out.

The psychic manifestations of the reality of this risk, and of the existential contradiction that characterizes it, are found in exemplary form in the very variable and empirical nosological classifications of psychiatry. Thus, because of its failure to go beyond a certain critical content, presence stands on the verge of further becoming, but in a suspended (*inattuale*) position. The reality of the world appears strange, mechanical, sordid, simulated, inconsistent, perverse, dead; and presence is felt as lost, dreamy, estranged from itself, and so forth.

The madman is detached from the present, precisely because he cannot fully “be-there” (*esserci*) in the present, being still anchored or polarized in an undecided critical moment of his own personal history, where the chance of any overcoming is reduced. Thus the person stands non-dialectically in presence; no longer as an instance of conscious awareness, or active memory, but as symptom.

On the other hand, the unsurpassed content can assert itself by returning as uncontrollable psychic estrangement, dressed up in obsessions, phobias, and hallucinations, or even converted into certain organic behaviors that fall outside conscious control. Furthermore, when there is a risk that a particular critical content might not be surmounted, this content may enter presence as an obscure anguish of limits. It is as if critical content were asking for its “beyond”—that is some formal definition from the surpassing aspect of presence. Because this request remains unanswered, or without an adequate response, an unbridled allusive tension of content ensues, which can chaotically turn into anything, without, however, being able to exhaust the unrestrained allusive impulse (and it cannot do so because—for as long as the crisis lasts—the impulse is in itself inexhaustible, unable to find the formal, objectivizing, and qualifying definition of presence).

Without doubt psychopaths attempt to employ specific techniques to defend themselves against the risk of their illness, but they fail because they are inadequate. Their inadequacy rests in the fact that they do not reestablish the spiritual dialectic. That is, they do not retake control of the psychic realities that are alienated, by reinserting them in the cultural circuit and rediscovering them to values. The “divide” (or trauma) persists, and with the divide, the illness. Among the inadequate responses—i.e., those not open to the world of values—one may take, for example, delusions of grandeur, in which the madman reacts to the extraordinary breadth of obscure callings deriving from the crisis by caricaturing himself proportionately. Thus the aggrandizement of self, characteristic of such deliriums, takes form. This is exaggeration instead of genius precisely because of the miserable feebleness of real values, and for the terrible cultural void that can be felt.

Likewise, melancholic depression, with its monstrous sentiments of blame and abjection, contains an inadequate form of interpretive defense, which manifests itself precisely in these sentiments. This experience is certainly founded on a radical powerlessness of being-there, but so little open to values and history that it can sometimes take the form of a *naturalistic cycle*, that is, a periodic oscillation between depression and mania (the so-called manic-depressive psychosis). The limit case of inadequate defense is the blocked will of catatonic stupor when all possible contents become dangerous and every moment becomes hazardous for presence. Then one has the pathological reaction of psychic block, or the spasmodic attempt to make oneself the prisoner of a particular content. To

maintain this imprisonment, all changes imposed from the outside are rejected up to the point of physical exhaustion, as in catalepsy, or repeatedly mirrored, as in echolalia or echomimicry.

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At the root of the radical crisis of presence lies the inability to put life (*il vitale*) into dialectic relationship with *ethos* and *logos* so that life, in this a-dialectical withdrawal, ceases to be a live and vital passion—which drives civilization and history—configuring itself instead as mere “suffering,” as impulsivity, parasitic representation, inexpiable guilt, and so on. This has been, if not noticed, at least glimpsed by some representatives of modern psychiatry. “The entire history of madness,” wrote Pierre Janet in 1889, “stems from the weakness of actual synthetic power, which is itself moral weakness and psychological misery. Genius, on the other hand, is a power of synthesis capable of forming new ideas, which no pre-existing science could foresee: it is the highest degree of moral potency” (Janet 1889: 478).

Here he talks of “moral potency”: and certainly this dialectical power, which transforms nature into culture, can truly be considered the fundamental human *ethos*. Animal vitality embraces and nourishes dialectical power *in order to* open it to singular, specific economic, political, juridical, moral, poetic, and scientific productions.

Some psychoanalytic concepts—despite the distortion typical of this psychological school—can be taken, allusively at least, to indicate the same dialectical relationship. What Freud defines as *libido* (which he essentially considers in the form of sexual vitality) is, in reality, presence. It is the synthetic energy that overcomes situations according to distinct faculties of action. When Freud talks of the *fixation* of *libido* at a particular past stage, assigning to this *fixation* the possibility of neurotic regression, he confirms, within the frame of his theory, that mental illness is a critical content that has not been overcome, chosen and consciously defined by presence. Without doubt Freud, in conformity with the assumptions of his theory, gives decisive importance to the situation of the individual’s sexual life, which is ultimately the only crucial thing. Furthermore, he interprets fixation as a failed evolution of sexuality. Apart from this limitation, which is serious indeed, he nevertheless lets one catch a glimpse of the important concept of physical presence as energy that overcomes. Similarly the concept of *complex* suggests an undecided conflict in which presence has remained polarized, entering in existential contradiction with itself. *Translation* and *sublimation* hint at the retrieval and resolution of the conflict in a particular cultural “value”; and so on.

But we find the most fitting precursor of the concept of crisis of presence not in modern psychology, but in Hegel, who on this matter has partly stated, and partly implied what is essential. What is here called “presence” corresponds to “self-feeling”⁴ in Hegel, which he defined as follows:

4. A reference to Hegel’s idea of Selbstgefühl deployed in the passage cited below. It refers to the unity of the subject/individual at a level above the registration of different sensations, yet below the level of consciousness: a precognitive unification of sensations.—Trans.

The feeling totality, as individuality, is essentially this: distinguishing itself within itself, and awakening to the *judgment within itself*, in virtue of which it has *particular* feelings and stands as a *subject* in respect of these determinations of itself. The subject as such posits them *within itself* as *its* feelings. It is immersed in this *particularity* of sensations, and at the same time, through the ideality of the particular, in them it joins together with itself as a subjective unit. In this way it is *self-feeling*—and yet it is only in the *particular feeling*. (Hegel 2007: 114; § 407)⁵

Now, the subject as self-feeling can be susceptible to illness; that is “to the disease of remaining fast in a particularity of its self-feeling, unable to refine it to ideality and overcome it” (Hegel 2007: 114; § 408). Here the risk of presence is posed with utmost clarity as the impossibility of overcoming one of its particular contents—that is to define it according to distinct forms of cultural coherence. For Hegel the physical subject is the being-itself (*il se stesso*) as coherent or rational consciousness. The pathological subject is this being-itself as prisoner of a particular content:

The fully furnished *self* of intellectual consciousness is the subject as an internally consistent consciousness, which orders and conducts itself in accordance with its individual position and its connection with the likewise internally ordered external world. But when it remains ensnared in a particular determinacy, it fails to assign that content the intelligible place and the subordinate position belonging to it in the individual world-system which a subject is. In this way the subject finds itself in the *contradiction* between its totality systematized in its consciousness, and the particular determinacy in that consciousness, which is not pliable and integrated into an overarching order. This is *derangement*. (Hegel 2007: 114–15; § 408)

Obviously the limitations of the Hegelian self-feeling are the limitations and defects of Hegelian dialectics itself. The totality of the subject is not here the distinction of cultural forms, but still rational consciousness, understood as simple judgment in itself and as the referral of its feelings to itself: where it concerns the synthetic power through categories of action, or the unity-distinction of this faculty. However, aside from this limitation, Hegel understands with extraordinary acuity the substance of what I am calling “*crisis of presence*.” When Hegel states that the spirit is free and thus not susceptible to illness—while self-feeling can fall into a contradiction between its subjectivity, which in itself is free, and a particularity, *which does not then become ideal but remains stuck in self-feeling*—he is hinting at the idea that the spirit, that is the presence engaged in the categorization of cultural forms, is physical presence. On the other hand, the presence which does not push its contents over into the *ideality of form* is necessarily an ill presence, which is losing itself.

When Hegel claims that the old metaphysical concept of spirit (*spirito*) as soul (*anima*) is in truth the idea of the spirit as susceptible to madness (for if the soul-substance should only exist as natural and fastened in existential finitude, this is indeed the concept of madness), he expresses, in the language of his system, the

5. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Science*, Pt. 3, Philosophy of Mind, § 407. Translated from the German by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (2007: 114).—Trans.

idea that being-there is the generative synthetic energy of cultural dialectic, and that when being-there is reduced to mere natural existence the catastrophe of cultural life, human freedom and history occurs:

But in earlier metaphysics it was regarded as soul, as a thing; and only as a thing, i.e. as something natural and in being, is it liable to derangement, to the finitude lodged in it. . . . The mind that is determined as merely being, in so far as such being is un-dissolved in its consciousness, is diseased. (Hegel 2007: 115; § 408)

The spirit as being which exists only partially, and that stands in consciousness without resolution, is presence fixated or entangled in one of its contents, and thus not present anymore. This is because going beyond its contents is the very definition of presence. Moreover, *being without resolution* signals content that remains unmediated and undefined by cultural values, and it fails to become determinable content, but returns as untamable symptom, as tyrannical extraneity. But there is more: madness as spirit becoming nature is precisely the risk of not being-there as presence, of not being-there in a human history, that is of receding onto the level of nature, where presence does not have a place. Here we reach the supreme existential alternatives: either healthy presence that opens itself up to the works and days of human culture; or ill presence that loses both itself and the world and plunges into madness.

However, Hegel himself highlights in a passage of his *Encyclopaedia* (Hegel 2007: 114–30; § 408) that the disease attacking “self-feeling” does not arise without opposition and resistance on the part of the sick person, and that alienation is not an abstract loss of reason, but a contradiction within reason itself. That is, the crisis of presence is a crisis inasmuch as it is perceived as risk—even as the ultimate risk, the destruction of what is human. In fact, the ultimate risk of presence is accompanied—at least as far as presence resists it—by a total reaction, which is anguish. If we purge this idea of all irrelevant interpretations nourished by the abstractions of metaphysics—from cryptogamy⁶ with the immediacy of religious experience or even from moral inertia or latent morbidities—and if at the same time we refrain from falling into the easy empiricisms of psychopathology, we find that anguish is a reaction of presence in the face of the risk of not being able to overcome critical contents, and of feeling oneself headed for supreme abdication. In other words anguish is the risk of losing the very possibility of deploying the formal energy of being-there.

Anguish signposts the attack on the very roots of human presence, the alienation of oneself from oneself, culture’s plunge into nature. Anguish underlines the risk of losing the distinction between subject and object, between thought and action, representation and judgment, vitality and morality—it is the scream of someone tottering on the edge of the abyss. It is because presence, in its radical crisis, can no longer make itself present to historical process, and is losing the ability of being the meaning and norm of this process, that anguish can correctly be interpreted as anguish at history, or better as anguish over not being-there in a human history. When it is maintained that anguish is never anguish over something, but over nothing, the proposition is acceptable, but only in the sense that here it is not the loss of *this* or *that* which is at stake, but the very possibility of

6. A de Martino solecism, apparently meaning a hidden bond or linkage.—Trans.

the *what* as formal energy. Such loss or annihilation is not absolute nothingness, but the nothingness of presence. It is not not-being, but not-being-there—the destruction of cultural life and human history.

This fundamental characteristic of anguish is occasionally visible in psychopathological treatises, despite their empiricism. “The sick person does not feel anguish at some thing, they are anguish, without awareness of either an object or a subject.” “The object is the ordered use of excitation, and the consciousness of the self is the necessary completion of the awareness of the object. However in the catastrophic laceration of anguish there is no object, and hence anguish is without content and definite awareness of the self.” “What the sick person undergoes is the laceration of the structure of the personality. One cannot even say that they are feeling anguish, they are anguish and become one with it in this unspeakable tumult in which subject and object disappear.” “Anguish is the ultimate danger, that is the approach of that final stage in which the organism cannot adapt to the environment, and it is threatened in its very existence.” These propositions by Kurt Goldstein (1929), though inadequate for their empiricism, find clarification and truth in the conception of anguish as a total reaction to the radical risk of the loss of presence. What indeed can the loss of distinction between subject and object mean, that immediate rise of anguish, that laceration in the structure of personality, that unutterable overthrowing that carries with it the essential risk of not being able to adapt to one’s surroundings? What can that feeling “*in seine Existenz bedroht*” mean if not the destruction of being-there in the sense we have clarified? Freud’s conception of anguish, on the other hand, is far less useful for orientation, entangled as it is with the dubious concepts of “libido” and “repression.”⁸

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If this is the nature of the crisis of presence then what is its relation to religious experience, the domain of the sacred? In general two antagonistic positions are taken: either one denies that there could ever be an essential relation between the risk of pathological alienation and the sacred, or one passes—albeit with different temperaments, nuances and cautions—to the extreme opposite with the preposterous result of confounding religion with madness (rarely does anyone state this explicitly, but too often the distinction between the two rests solely on good intentions). The supporters of the first thesis—who often belong to a particular faith—point to the ethical and speculative values in which world religions are rich, and which in smaller measure are also found in more elementary religions. And it is easy for them to say that the madman is mad, while modern civilization was born from the “delirium” of Christ or the “epilepsy” of Paul.

On the other hand, psychiatrists are naturally inclined to favor the connection between alienation and religious life, so frequently do they professionally encounter the “supernatural” and the “gods” among the mentally ill. Nonetheless,

7. Having one’s existence threatened.—Trans.

8. For an overview of the different conceptions of anguish in modern psychiatry (and in existentialism) see Boutonier (1949).

the connection is unclear. In reading the book of Georges Dumas on this topic, for example, one is left perplexed over the difference between the “pathological theogenesis” about which the author writes, and the ordinary theogenesis of the great civilizations of history (Dumas 1946).⁹ Actually there is a relationship between the risk of pathological alienation and religious life and not in the banal sense that “sometimes” or “accidentally” whoever is engaged in the experience of the sacred could “go out of his mind,” but really as a dialectical relationship between risk of crisis and religious techniques of reintegration; in the sense that through the mediation of such techniques recovery is facilitated and one’s operative powers are rediscovered according to forms and values, whose exercise the crisis had compromised.

To illustrate the dialectical character of the relationship between pathological breakdown and religious life we can take for example a work which has had, in the last forty years or so, a notable influence in the areas of philosophy and history of religions: Rudolf Otto’s, *The idea of the holy* (1950). It is a theological work, yet nonetheless, for this very reason, it can offer some valuable insights. Obviously on one condition: that the problematic begins for us there where Otto considers that he has reached the edge of the known world, namely the vivid experience of the numinous that is present. The characteristic connotation, profoundly irrational, of this presence would be—according to Otto—the “radical other” (*ganz Andere*); whence the “blind horror” (*blinde Entsetzen*), the “demonic awe” (*dämonische Scheu*), which take hold of and subjugate the poor creature. Now this “radically other,” which unnerves whoever experiences it, is precisely the “radical” risk of not being-there; the alienation which threatens to set it in motion toward its exact pathological meaning, the catastrophe that presence must resist with all its powers. Profane (or ordinary) alterity is always relative, inserted into the formal circuit and qualified. But when it starts to become “eccentric,” isolated, and presence feels itself enmeshed in this tremendous temptation to abdicate, then that “radically” other also begins to appear, which can be interpreted as the terrifying signal of pathological alienation. *Blinde Entsetzen* is also eloquent: *entsetzen* has the double meaning of “to dispossess” and “to horrify.” What it means is that here is about to be consummated the loss, not of “this” or “that,” but of the very same formal

9. By way of example, consider the following passage: “It is because the gods of our illnesses are most often personal that they are limited in omniscience, action and ubiquity. For this same reason they are not so much spiritual agents as counterparts of the ill person and to the degree that they are nothing other than private gods these ill persons are not to be conflated with the faithful followers of a religion” (Dumas 1946: 321). Now the history of religions, especially primitive religions, knows a great number of strictly private and personal numinous entities with limited powers (one thinks of the *nagual* and of certain forms of the *tijurunga*). This does not allow one, however, within the respective historical contexts, to speak of “pathological theogenesis.” If, however, we take the word “private” in this passage of Dumas as meaning “not immediately open to the shared values of the given historical context” then one obtains a valid criterion for discriminating between “pathological” and “ordinary theogenesis.” For specialist works on the psychopathology of religion over the past fifty years, see: Murisier (1909); Moses (1906); Birnbaum (1920); Oesterreich (1922); Schneider (1929); Storch (1930); and Janet (1926, 1930). To this list should be added these works from a psychoanalytical perspective: Freud (1907, 1913); Reik (1928); and Rank (1919). For the Zurich school: Jung (1942).

energy of “which.” It is in fact from such radical dispossession that the characteristic horror that individuates crisis is born. However, the dialectical character of the relationship crisis–recovery in the experience of the sacred is illustrated very clearly by the expression *dämonische Scheu*. In fact, if the emphasis falls on *Scheu* one has something practically identical to a state of anxiety, to pathological *blinde Entsetzen*. However, if the accent falls on *dämonische* then recovery is already beginning to make inroads, even if in a very elementary way, and horror will no longer be “blind” if it at least can glimpse a demonic image, which is part of a mythico-religious cultural tradition organically inserted into the historical world in which one lives.

Similar considerations may be made with regard to the other moment of the “numinous,” the *fascinans*, which is inseparable from the *tremendum*.¹⁰ The paradoxical character of this polarity does not constitute in the least a mysterious nexus—that one may only relive in its immediacy, or stimulate and suggest through the selection of fitting words—but it contains a transparent dialectic. That which in the crisis repels and subjugates, namely the *tremendum* of presence becoming alienated and lost, nonetheless attracts and calls into relationship, to recovery and to reintegration. This attraction, or irresistible call, is the *fascinans* of the “radically other.” In the limitation of religious experience that which calls is the numinous, but for critical thought that which calls is the alienation of presence asking for reintegration into human history.

This characteristic dialecticity reveals the integral historicity of the hieropoetic¹¹ process. The risk of losing human history takes place within human history itself, and it cannot have any hieropoetic meaning without this reference to the concrete. Now, to say “history” means, in the first place, to say “society,” that is—at least for human societies—a mode of collective organization for the technical domination of nature; in order for society to be disclosed to law and ethics, poetry and science. The measurement of real being-there in human history cannot leave out the first step of mediation, that is, the consideration of a socio-economic regime determined in a certain way. If the technical sphere is poor and elementary, if nature dwarfs it with its excessive power; and if retrospection is narrow and prospective consciousness of effective behaviors for the dominion over natural forces is limited; if in the interior of human society particular groups stand like “nature” in relation to certain others—that is lowered to a function which is merely technical and instrumental—then, for these very reasons, the limitation and fragility of presence as the free power to surmount situations arises, and the risk of radical alienation becomes huge. In this diffuse atmosphere of existential precariousness the process of becoming is punctuated by moments of crisis in which historicity “protrudes” (*sporge*) and presence risks not being-there. However, even here, the quantity, quality, and degree of risk in such moments, is not definable in a single way, for these matters are determined differently depending on the structure of the society. A people who live by hunting and gathering, and who have not gone beyond the fashioning of basic implements out of stone does not have the same crisis moments as a society founded on cultivation by the hoe, or one that practices

10. A reference to Otto’s description of the numinous as “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.”—Trans.

11. A neologism meaning “sacred-making.”—Trans.

pastoral nomadism, or one that might have come to variably combine these modes of primitive economy rising up to the invention of the plough and the cultivation of grains, or one which may have passed through the various stages of industrial evolution up to the invention of machinery. Even in such a society with profound social stratification moments of crisis are not articulated in the same way in each stratum of the hierarchical organization.

Religious reintegration, however, is historical also in another sense because it takes very different forms even on the level of reintegration itself. In general, the hieropoetic process is to be interpreted as the choice of exemplary critical moments and as a technique—or system of techniques—for facing the risk of alienation and re-disclosing those formal powers which crisis threatens to paralyze. It is as if a part—in some given societies an enormous part—of the technical power of man were diverted from its use for the domination of natural forces by means of the economic organization of society and the manipulation of certain material or mental instruments, to find its application in the task of restoring an horizon to presence, and of preventing—in critical moments—the same fundamental power from which culture and human history come forth from being naturalized. The fundamental trait of religious reintegration is this technique of institutional de-historification.

From the weave of becoming arises a series of critical moments, of exemplary character for the existential regime here in question. These are moments which, for various reasons, represent “passages” par excellence, during which one is particularly caught up in being-there, and precisely because of this they can cause an increased risk of radical alienation. These passages are de-historified, that is, they are resolved—masked and protected—in the repetition of the identical; and in the end as if they were not new (or historical), but as if they were repeating an archetypal situation, which has *already* taken place in metahistory. In such guise, through the pious fraud of this “already” guaranteed on the level of metahistory, the “here” and the “now” of history is re-disclosed, and presence regains—in varying degrees of awareness and cultural potential—the plenitude of its own formal horizons.¹²

Consider, by way of example, an important aspect of the myth of the “center” among the Achilpa, a totemic clan of the Aranda people (Central Australia). The Aranda are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, and this means that for such a group, forced in its ancient migrations to cross, for their livelihood, new territories, the historical emergence of this crossing must acquire particular prominence. The crisis, which is directly documented ethnologically, here takes the form of a “territorial anxiety,” which has its corresponding pathology in specific forms of dromophobia (and possibly also of agoraphobia). The Achilpa myth clearly reflects the process of religious de-historification. There is a center of the “world” where the task of shaping the territory was performed by the mythical ancestor according to a relation of repetition, in the sense that the territory constituted, for each of its temporary dwellings, a reiteration of the mythical center. During migrations from South to North, Achilpa groups carry the center of the world with them, represented by a pole, and at every stopping place they plant the pole and

12. For the discussion of this thesis in polemical dialogue with the “phenomenology of religion” of G. van der Leeuw, see de Martino (1953–54).

celebrate the ceremony, which repeats the myth. In this way, the historicity of the crossing gets concealed. The act of walking becomes permanence at the center, and meanwhile—within such dehistoricification—truly disclosed. The myth narrates that when the post broke during the migration, and the ritual of reiteration of the archetypal center could no longer be performed, the Achilpa groups could no longer continue their peregrinations, and they let themselves fall to the ground, crowding together in anticipation of death.¹³

The analysis of the *modus operandi* of the technique of religious dehistoricification is of considerable interest. A ritual presence comes to be instituted, with a reiterative, impersonal, and dreamy character. Such a presence, in which everything tends to become stereotypical and traditional, is technically suited to both trigger descent (*catabasi*) toward psychic realities at risk of alienation, or to start the ascent (*anabasi*) toward values. Ritual (or mythico-ritual) presence is thus to be understood as a presence that works under a regime of “saving” (*risparmio*), that tends to restore the balance that has started to tip toward failure. On the other hand, the ethics and rationality which, under the protection of such a regime, attain freedom, continually act on myth and ritual. They permeate them with their substance, humanize religions more and more and engrain values within techniques that raise the rite to cult, sacrifice, and prayer, and the demonic to the divine, and the myth to mental formations in which morality and law, poetry and science shine forth—to the point where values, having broken the technical mythico-ritual protection, begin to assert themselves in consciousness proper as such, in their human interiority and autonomy.

Let us consider, for example, the lament as an important moment of funeral rituals in antiquity. Here the initial crisis appears in its grandeur: we find typically pathological manifestations, such as Gudhrun’s melancholic inaction before the corpse of Sigfried in the first lay of Gudhrun in the *Eddas*, or as the “fury” of Achilles in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, when Antilochus holds the hands of the hero for fear he might cut his throat with his sword [upon hearing the news of Patroclus’ death], or like the desperation of David at the death of Saul (“grabbing at his clothes he tore them off, and so did all those present”); and we also find the *blinde Entsetzen* before the corpse, and that *dämonische Sheu* which makes Apollo say in Euripides’ *Alcestis*: “But I, for fear pollution overtake me in the house, am leaving the shelter of this roof I love so well, for already I see death hard by.”¹⁴ But at the same time, at the other end of the process, we encounter the rhythmic cadence of ritual lamentation, in lament in the context of the cult of heroes, or in the Egyptian funeral lament that repeats for every deceased—who is an Osiris—the mythical lamentation of Isis and Nephthys. Finally, we encounter it in the religious complexity of the lamentations of Jeremiah. Furthermore, on Greek soil, already beyond ritual and myth, we come to the Homeric funeral

13. For the demonstration of this thesis and the relevant documentation see de Martino (1951–52).

14. Ll. 22ff. Apollo is speaking about the impending murder of Alcestis by her husband Admetus. E. P. Coleridge translation of the Ancient Greek (Euripides 1920).—Trans.

lament (*goos*), the choral lament of tragedy (*kommos*), and lyric threnody (*threnos*).¹⁵

Moral, political and poetic values are then reached. The process that led from the dissipation of madness to the liberation of those values took place, in the ancient world, through the mediation of lament, as a recovery technique. “Get away from the graves!” warned Goethe, and the lament enables that with its own suitable techniques. It is worth lingering over the *modus operandi* of such technique. The chaotic *planctus*¹⁶ of the crisis is transformed into a ritual *planctus* in which alienated psychic realities (melancholic inaction, self-harming impulses, and the like) are rediscovered, retrieved, and concentrated in the hypnoid state of the ritual presence of lament. In such a state, these psychic realities are disciplined according to an anonymous and dreamy “measure”; in the “this-is-how-one-mourns” stereotype of tradition. At the same time one has mythical mastery over another psychic reality in alienation, the image of the corpse. At the most basic level such elaboration does not proceed beyond the ghoulishness of the deceased, and this moment is reflected in ritual in a series of techniques of separation, so that the deceased is appeased and does not return as a ghost, that is, as an unrelated psychic externality. The ritualized *planctus* is hence filled with meanings: it is necessary to show the extent of grief to the deceased; quench their thirst for blood and life; shout to scare them and convince them to leave for their new residence; disfigure one’s own appearance to escape their gaze; and so on. At a higher level, moral values are liberated. The same separating gestures can acquire moral value: mourning becomes the Homeric tribute owed to the deceased (*geras thanonton*); and the laceration of cheeks to the point of bloodshed (“*ut sanguine ostenso inferis satisfaciant*”)¹⁷ is softened in the order (*kosmos*) restored by the living, as in Euripides’ *Suppliants*: “Come, you who join the mourners’ wail, come, O sympathetic band, to join the dance, which Hades honors; let the white nail be stained red, as it rends your cheeks, let your skin be streaked with gore; for honors rendered to the dead are an ornament (*kosmos*) to the living.”¹⁸

At an even higher and more complex level, which finds its expression in the religious life connected to the Osiris cycle, the generic “this-is-how-one-mourns” of the ritual dehistoricization is transformed into the repetition of ritual: every deceased is an Osiris, having like him died and been resurrected, and every lamentation reiterates the mythical mourning of Isis and Nephthys. The whole technique of lamentation is directed toward the facilitation of the recovery of presence: hence a regulation for mourning is instituted—the Homeric leader of the dirge (*exarchos gooio*)—which periodizes the *planctus* in relatively regular intervals, and reshapes it in emotive refrains, so that between refrains the necessary horizon

15. On these relations see Reiner (1938). In particular, for the relation between funerary ritual lamentation and tragedy, see Nilsson (1951: 61ff.).

16. The Latin word for mourning, which includes acts of self-injury such as beating the breast or tearing one’s hair in addition to wailing.—Trans.

17. A reference to the Latin author Varro who reported this as a funerary practice. Cp. Leviticus 19, 28: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead.”—Trans.

18. Euripides (1938), *Suppliants*, ll. 71–79. Translated from Ancient Greek by E. P. Coleridge.—Trans.

for the inauguration of the rhythmic discourse of authentic lamentation can be restored to presence. The emotive refrains are divided between leader and chorus, or even ceded by the leader to the chorus, establishing a collective assistance in overcoming the most hazardous critical moments. Finally, for the rhythmic *logos* of lamentation, particular precautions are also effective for disclosing presence, that is the repetition of gestural, literary, and melodic stereotypes set by tradition. This ritual *logos* is, then, a *protected* discourse, that allows one to reach—to the extent to which one is able—the personal “variation,” the reemergence of the historical situation, the resolution of “dying” into “this death” and of “mourning” into “this mourning of mine”; the rediscovery of the ethos of memories and sentiments, and sometimes even a glimmer of poetry.

In the aforementioned first lay of Gudhrun the scene of the lamentation appears in the reelaboration of the epic, and hence already far beyond its real ritual form with all its mythical moments. Yet, the technical function of ritual is still apparent. Beside the corpse of the murdered king, Gudhrun lies still, dry-eyed, stiffened in a sort of melancholic inaction or stupefied lethargy:

Then did Guthrun think to die, / When she by Sigurth sorrowing
sat; / Tears she had not, nor wrung her hands, / Nor ever wailed, as
other women. / To her the warriors wise there came, / Longing her
heavy woe to lighten; / Grieving could not Guthrun weep, / So sad her
heart, it seemed, would break. (Bellows 1926: 412, st. 1-2)

In vain the princes' noble wives try to induce her into lamentation each narrating her own misfortunes. Gudhrun stubbornly refuses to enter into the ritual event that would mediate recovery, and remains trapped in her melancholic inaction. Then Gullrond commands the unveiling of the king's corpse, and sets the traditional cushion for the lamentation beneath her knees:

The shroud she lifted from Sigurth, laying / his well-loved head on the
knees of his wife: / “look on thy loved one, and lay thy lips / to his as if
yet the hero lived . . . ” (Bellows 1926: 415, st. 12)

Gudhrun pulls herself together, and breaks the painful spell of her “polarization,” and comes alive to the task of overcoming the situation; but such recovery is accomplished through the mediation of ritual, that is by undertaking a series of traditional gestures and behaviors; by following, that is, what “one does” when “one needs” to lament the dead:

Once alone did Guthrun look; / his hair all clotted with blood
beheld, / the blinded eyes that once shone bright, / the hero's breast
that the blade had pierced. / Then Guthrun bent, on her pillow
bowed, / her hair was loosened, her cheek was hot, / and the tears like
raindrops downward ran . . . ” (Bellows 1926: 415-16, st. 13-14)

Gudhrun's *planctus* is not an isolated crisis, for it is progressively disciplined in the stereotypical patterns of ritual and the meanings of myth (although such meanings are lost in the mythical reelaboration of the *Edda*). Within the protective safeguards of the ritualized and mythicized *planctus*, Gudhrun will finally be reborn into the ethos of memories and sentiments, and attempt to widen in the rhythmic discourse of lamentation her own sorrow which becomes human once again:

So was my Sigurth o'er Gjuki's sons / as the spear-leek grown above the grass, / or the jewel bright borne on the band, / the precious stone that princes wear. / To the leader of men I loftier seemed / and higher than all of Herjan's maids; / as little now as the leaf I am / on the willow hanging; my hero is dead." (Bellows 1926: 416-17, st. 17-18)

In this technical framework of ancient ritual lamentation a number of further "comfortable" operations become possible, such as allowing a professional mourner to lead the lamentation or its repetition according to a ritual calendar, so that there is a day or even an hour for mourning, potentially leaving one free in the intervals from any demands. This produces a concentration of mourning in the corresponding ritual presence, which can be invoked or suspended as needed. On the other hand the repetition of the lamentation in successive moments permits another technical opportunity, to face the psychic realities in alienation not only in their "protected" form, but also in successively reduced doses, divided according to the phases of the ritual calendar.

* * *

Let us go back now, for a moment, to the starting point of this discussion, that is to *Il mondo magico*. Evidently magic as well, like religion, is a reintegrative technique grounded upon dehistoricization, and the only difference is in the degree of awareness with which "values" are rediscovered, reenacting themselves in the experience of the sacred. Where this awareness is minimal, and the technique acquires predominant control subjectively, we find magic. Where, on the other hand, the ascent toward ethos and *logos* reshapes deeply the initial risk of alienation, it is rightly established linguistic custom to use the word "religion."

So, for example, the demonic terror of the dead, and the ritual techniques aimed at separating the dead from the living, constitute a technical-magical moment, for here the risk of crisis is still very close to its immediacy, and the ritual of separation can be—only through bold dialectic extrapolation by the historian—interpreted as the first glimmer of that ethos which finds its truth in Goethe's: "Get away from the graves!" If, on the other hand, in ritual, moments pertinent to the "dear memory" of the deceased, to the cult of this memory, to the recurring need of regaining energy and comfort from their deeds (think of Foscolo's "hence shall we draw the auspices" (Foscolo [1962] 2002: 24, ll. 181-2), become prominent, then the designation of religious experience seems to be more appropriate. Beyond this difference in degree it is not possible to introduce any other difference between magic and religion, and any form of magic, however elementary or unrefined, is dialectically open to values. Furthermore, any "religious" experience, however elevated and complex, has its own technical-magical moment, or mythical-ritualistic moment, within which reintegration becomes viable. Hence "Christian" ethos, poetry, art, and philosophy take place within the great myth of Christ and the solemn ritual of the breaking of the bread, and they have been delivered to civilization and history under the aegis of the great dehistoricizing technique, of the dramatic "regime of saving," according to which the good news has *already* been announced once, and the becoming of history can be periodically solved in the ritual reenactment and repetition of the sacrifice of the human-God, so that the promised Kingdom *already* begins—every time—in the ritual.

This line of thought allows us to rediscover the truth of another point stressed by Croce regarding my book of ten years or so ago: namely that the sorcerer as “redeemer” is in the end “on the same level as the redeemed” and “struggles in the same sick and blind vitality that, by twisting about on the bed, for a moment escapes the pain” (Croce 1949: 203).¹⁹ This observation is acceptable insofar as, in my book, the dialectic sense of the relationship between “magical” techniques and “openness toward values” was missing, and there was a tendency to consider such techniques as intrinsically and independently salvific, even if only in their own historic world. It is now clear that magico-religious techniques do not save if they do not open to values, if they cannot be historiographically reconstructed as economic moments that aid ascent:²⁰ it is likewise true that in mental illness there are technical attempts to defend oneself, which simulate magic or religion, but which are not one or the other, precisely because the ascent is incomplete, and the “divide” (or trauma) that makes them sick remains.

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19. A reference to Dante, *Purgatorio*, VI, 150–51.—Trans.

20. Also regarding “rediscovered” truths, Omodeo [Adolfo Omodeo, Italian historian and teacher of de Martino at the University of Naples] was right when, in a letter written during the drafting of *Il mondo magico*, he observed that “logically the history of magic does not exist, for history can be made of the positive and not the negative; and magic is a power which we relinquish in the journey of reason, indeed because it is revealed to be inadequate and noncreative.” Back then I did not consider such admonition, and rather in *Il mondo magico* I carelessly argued with Omodeo on this point (1947: 192). Truly a history of magical techniques as such would not have any human sense and if in *Il mondo magico* it seemed that such sense existed, that was due to the values that those techniques opened and to the extent to which they opened them, as emphasized by Paci.

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Ernesto DE MARTINO (1908-1965) completed his doctorate at the University of Naples in 1932 with a thesis in the history of religions on ancient Greek ritual. Influenced by the thought of Antonio Gramsci and Carlo Levi, he held positions in the socialist and communist parties until his resignation in the mid-1950s. His political concern for the subaltern led him to undertake ethnographic research in south Italy, resulting in his "southern trilogy": *Sud e magia*, *Morte e pianto rituale*, and *La terra del rimorso*. At his death he was working on a study of apocalyptic movements, eventually published as the 700 page tome, *La fine del mondo*.