

Intimate Microspheres in Fernando Pessoa and Other Refugees from History: Notes on the Topology of Symbolic Space and Extracultural Condition

EWA A. ŁUKASZYK

Universiteit Leiden

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The essay deals with the poetic creation of intimate space bubbles, as if isolated from the rest of the world reducible to a map dominated by History and the imperial mechanism as its driving force. The text in focus is *Antinous* by Fernando Pessoa, where such a microsphere of affect is built around a homoerotic relationship. The case of the poet living in the times of the advent of Portuguese fascism is put in the context of several East-European refugees from History striving to reconstruct their lost intimacies in the margin of the hegemonies that ousted them from their own countries (Cioran, Eliade, Miłosz). I claim that the subject constructing his intimate topology transgresses the limitations of his cultural inscription, that appears as disgracefully locatable, hemmed in History; he adopts an extracultural stance. The refugees from History, losing their language and the immediate contact with their national cultures, strive to communicate with a larger, universal dimension. In a way, such private, extracultural topologies run parallel to the imperial claim of universalism. Yet the microsphere of affect communicating with the universalist macrosphere introduces a qualitative difference, as it is built upon the authenticity of loss and longing, rather than drive for hegemony and control.

I.

In 1884, Edwin Abbott, a theologian and mathematician educated at St John's College, Cambridge, published a satirical novella *Flatland. A Romance of Many Dimensions*, settled in a two-dimensional world where women were reduced to simple line segments and men, always bigger and greater than them, were polygons with a varying number of sides (the narrator was a modest square, still better-off than a mere triangle). The book was intended both as social satire and vulgarization of the mathematical concept of dimension. Already at the time, it was a productive scientific notion, playing a crucial role in the efforts at transgressing the conceptual limitations of Euclidean geometry, present, among others, in the new, differential geometry postulated by the German mathematician Bernhard Riemann (1826-1866). Certainly, Abbot's book was not the only attempt at bringing those new concepts of space continuum closer to the general public. In 1888, the editor of the journal *San Francisco Examiner*, subscribing with the initials A.G.B., published an article under the title "Whither?," describing three cases of strange and sudden disappearance of people. The mystery was to be solved

by a German erudite, a certain doctor Hern from Leipzig, who admitted that those persons had fallen into a different dimension, predicted by non-Euclidean geometry. Those additional dimensions were supposed to create bubbles of complete void that the German scholar described as *vacua*. Later on, the alleged journalistic enquiry was included, under the title *Mysterious Disappearances*, in the volume of ghost stories *Can Such Things Be?*, leaving no further doubt about the identity of the author: the story had been written by the American master of supernatural genre and black humour, Ambrose Bierce.

This is how the expression “the fourth dimension” was to become durably associated with the domain of ghosts and all kinds of unearthly manifestations. Nonetheless, to speculate that the space we inhabit might be discontinuous and we might live in either a lower or a higher dimension are interesting thought experiments. The number of dimensions in which we are immersed has various implications. Abbot’s flat beings certainly could not eat their soup with a spoon; furthermore, they could not even have a digestive tube, because in such a case they would be divided into two separate parts. But the reality they inhabited was far richer than a Pointland without any dimension whatsoever, or a Lineland, where they would only be able to move back and forth in a single dimension. Two dimensions were just enough for many interesting things to happen, but the inhabitants of the Flatland were easy to control. They could be imprisoned simply by drawing a line around them. They could not jump across such a divide to break free (jumping would require an additional dimension, perpendicular to their world); so they remained completely isolated in their allotted section of the surface. Other polygons and line sections could neither get through to them nor see them, because, from their perspective, they could perceive only the dividing line that was circumscribing the prisoner. Yet the access to the third dimension, developing perpendicularly to the surface world of the Flatland, would offer an immediate insight into their prisons. If the polygons could construe it, they would set themselves free.

As people, not polygons, we live in a three-dimensional physical world (adding the fourth dimension of time). But what interesting things might happen if we could construe even more dimensions in the symbolic space we mentally inhabit? In such a case, we might perhaps be able to break free from many subtle forms of incarceration, jumping across the divides separating us from whatever we love. We might even seek refuge out of History, a Flatland of our own located on a political map drawn by hegemonic powers. Our homeland, the placedness of our belonging, is usually inscribed on such a flat surface of a map and thus hopelessly subordinated to hegemonic forces that repeatedly send us to exile and shatter the realities where we used to feel at home. As I think about it, our situation, after all, is not so very different from that of the inhabitants of the two-dimensional Flatland. The idea of constructing, through literature, an extra dimension of the symbolic space that the oppressed subjects might mentally and affectively inhabit is thus a tempting possibility. Let’s try to follow its implications.

II.

The Portuguese modernist Fernando Pessoa was yet another writer fascinated with the advent of the new, multidimensional geometry. He mentioned it, among other instances, in “Apontamentos para uma estética não-aristotélica”, an article attributed to his heteronym Álvaro de Campos and published in the review *Athena* in 1924. According to Pessoa/Campos, the advent of the new era of non-Euclidean geometry obliged the poets to revise also the canonical, Aristotelian aesthetics. By the time Pessoa created his heteronyms, the

mathematicians made a considerable progress in relation to Riemannian geometry. The original idea of five-dimensional field theory that Theodor Kaluza presented to Einstein in 1919 was to get a quantum interpretation by Oskar Klein in 1921. The latter introduced the hypothesis that the fifth dimension was microscopic, curled up into a circle with a radius as small as 10^{-30} cm; (later on, this hypothesis would become an important precursor to string theory). Certainly, it is reasonable to admit that Pessoa hardly got any insight in those hermetic aspects of the new physics; nonetheless, he strived to shape his poetical discourse in consonance with the vertiginous novelty of modern science. Both his ortho- and heteronymic writings are rich in paradoxes concerning inner surfaces (*cousa real por dentro*, a real thing seen from inside) that do not necessarily coincide with the external ones (*cousa real por fora*, a real thing seen from outside), as if he attempted to sketch his own multidimensional universe of poetic imagination, rich in mysterious “curled up” dimensions, in parallel to those of Einsteinian relativity and Kaluza-Klein theory. In its own poetic categories, that are necessarily far away from mathematical rigour, Pessoa’s vision seems to welcome a topological kind of reflection. The very project of heteronyms may be interpreted as the poet’s attempt at transforming himself, a mere polygon man reduced to the Portuguese Flatland, into a true multidimensional polyhedron bulging out of the platitude of the provincial reality that one might associate with his geographical and chronological location.

Pessoa, I dare say, may be regarded as an Abbottian polygon trying to unstick or peel himself off his native Flatland, against all the adhesive powers keeping him in place. His colonial biography – suspended, at a tender age, between two empires, the Portuguese and the British one – predisposed and prepared him for such a transgressive endeavour. Due to his widowed mother’s second marriage, he found himself in the household of the Portuguese consul in Durban, city where he also obtained his English-speaking education. Having created such a double cultural, mental and linguistic allegiance, he became alien to much of the Portuguese climate of his time. Even if, later on, Pessoa was to become the bard of Portuguese maritime and spiritual empire in *Mensagem*, he could not fully adopt the stance of a *saudosist* (representative of *saudosismo*, Portuguese literary nationalism) that was quite a natural choice for many of his fellow poets. He was also unable to provide yet another instance of the literary diction harmonized with the ideological background of the so called Lusitan integralism (*integralismo lusitano*). Instead, he constantly run parallel to himself in his heteronyms, such as Álvaro de Campos, and – even more remarkably – such as António Mora, a “neopagan” thinker partially covered by the shadow of the local form of fascism. On the other hand, it is not by accident that Álvaro de Campos in Lisbon is presented by his creator as an entity belonging somewhere else, as if he was a strange maritime organism accidentally blown onto a sandy beach. Campos, formed in Glasgow and vaguely representative of the type of Portuguese Jew, appears as not entirely a man of the nation in those years of exacerbated nationalism; he is rather the bearer of a non-identity and nationless condition of seamen, freebooters, lawless adventurers. This is why his *Ode marítima*, although written in Portuguese, echoes with a sailors’ song in English: *Fifteen men on the Dead Man’s Chest / Yo-ho ho and a bottle of rum!* (Pessoa, 1990: 169). And there is more than just English: strands of what appears as primary human speech are interwoven with Portuguese as the dominant language of the poem. The extensive text is segmented by repeated inarticulate irruptions, exclamations and vocalises, older than codified languages and identities, connoting precisely the absence of identification, legitimacy, law and ideology. A daring stance for integralist times.

Pessoa, as polyhedral as he might be, offers an abundant material for the study of the potential introduced by hegemonic systems of thought. In the general outlook of his ortho- and heteronymic creation, the reader receives a spectrum of possible attitudes of a subject confronted with hegemony, epitomized by colonial empires (especially the British and the Portuguese one) existing side by side on the political map of the world and superposed in the multidimensional mental space of Pessoa. As a bilingual writer, he participated in the spheres of communication produced by each of the imperial languages, sharing, at the same time, the burden of their ideologically determined discourses and speech practices. Yet, showing the relativity of each set of received coordinates, he was able to transcend and neutralize them. Perhaps this is why the imperial theme takes such an unexpected turn in his English-speaking poem *Antinous* – especially if we treat it as a counterbalance in relation to Pessoa's most famous achievement, the exalted vision of the Portuguese paracletic empire in *Mensagem*.

Certainly, *Antinous* is quite a peculiar imperial dream: that of an emperor mourning the loss of his young Bithynian lover. The bereavement, thus, is felt by an imperial ruler, not just one among countless imperial victims of all times; yet even an autocrat is also a man. The falling rain, one of those paradoxical phenomena involving the external and internal surfaces of people and things – “The rain outside was cold in Hadrian's soul” (Pessoa, 1995: 290) – seems to isolate the mourner as if in a space bubble, a separate dimension, forming a topological singularity. It bulges out of the usual playground on which the imperial history is enacted. The moment of dimensional unsticking provoked by unbearable loss, disturbing and contorting the subject that till then remained quite consubstantial with his imperial Flatland, is clearly identified. It forms as if a sharp edge between the usual reality of sovereignty and the sudden detachment from the usual two dimensions of the empire:

Suddenly did the emperor suppose
 He saw this room and all in it from far.
 He saw the couch, the boy, and his own frame
 Cast down against the couch, and he became
 A clearer presence to himself (...). (298)

The imperial map, “a scroll/rolled up”, sinks into the void, as “the wide world” becomes “hollow” with Antinous' absence; an unexpected depth emerges beyond the smooth, flat surface of things. Also, there appears a temporal bridge between the present moment and eternity: Hadrian conceives the idea of transforming his love into a marble, immortalizing Antinous in a “deathless statue”. Yet, with this simple act of posthumous commemoration, an essential change in the spatio-temporal tissue seems to occur, forming as if a shortcut, a channel of connection between the ephemeral and the eternal, the tiny scale of intimacy and the all-encompassing, transcontinental space:

Our love's incarnate and discarnate essence,
 That, like a trumpet reaching over seas
 And going from continent to continent,
 Our love shall speak its joy and woe, death-blent,
 Over infinities and eternities. (306)

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Even more puzzlingly, the image of Antinous is to connect more than just distant regions in a specific form of universalism issued from homosexual love transformed into a novel paradigm of memory. This new reality – that one might eventually call memetic – is directed towards the future in an expansion that appears as vaster and more durable than any “Roman victory”:

Yet thy true deathless statue I shall build
Will be no stone thing, but that same regret
By which our love's eternity is willed.
One side of that is thou, as gods see thee
Now, and the other, here, thy memory.
My sorrow will make that men's god, and set
Thy naked memory on the parapet
That looks upon the seas of future times. (304)

Mourning brings about the emergence of a dimension that is, so to say, perpendicular and disruptive in relation to the “wide world” of the empire, and more, perpendicular and disruptive in relation to the worldly reality of mortal mankind. This is how, on that particular “parapet” of time, the connection with the eternal sphere of gods suddenly becomes possible, as well as the connection between the present moment and the specific temporal sphere of endless future. The innermost intimacy – the secret involving the homosexual relationship – becomes the external edge, a balcony onto the beyond. Love is exposed, not to the worldly eye of Hadrian's contemporaries, but to eternal contemplation, destined to “loom white out of the past” and endlessly to create new affects: “In every heart the future will give rages/ Of not being our love's contemporary” (300).

The present of loss may only be overcome as a projection towards the future, universalized in a self-perpetuating longing, just as the poetic singularity of mourning pierces the dimensional continuum of the empire to establish a new sphere of authenticity. The microsphere of affect, created by the mourning emperor, breaks through the inhumanity of the imperial macrosphere, just as the very idea of homosexual relationship appears as perpendicular to the idea of the Roman empire and Roman virility, contradiction and conjunction all in one, drawing a line between what is human, inhuman and supra-human.

The microsphere involving Hadrian and Antinous (as a corpse) connotes the same innermost sphere of intimacy that Pessoa – as Bernardo Soares – symbolized, in *Livro de Desassossego*, by means of a child's porcelain doll; in Soares' opinion, the empire was not worth the risk of breaking it. A bisque doll – perhaps a minimalistic version of the honey-haired Bithynian slave destined for emperor's private recreations – epitomizes the hyperlocal dimension of one's first home and bedroom, the source of all belonging, as well as all longing in the years yet to come. One of the defining traits of this infantile microsphere is the privilege of ignoring its exact localization in the geopolitical space. The bisque doll has no place on the imperial map; it is extraterritorial. The same affective extraterritoriality will be searched for in a homosexual relationship, and utterly encountered in the mourning, enabling the final step onto the parapet of deathlessness and infinity.

III.

Poetic reflection on the value of the future tense is certainly not peculiar to Fernando Pessoa alone; George Steiner resumed it, under the title “Word against object”, in the third chapter of his seminal work *After Babel*. He also sketched, in a particularly pertinent way, the connection between the grammatical tense and the wish of seeking refuge outside History:

In Hell, that is to say in a grammar without futures, “we literally hear how the verbs kill time” (Mendelstam’s penetrating comment on Dante and on linguistic form echoes his own asphyxia under political terror, in the absence of tomorrow). But “at other times”, itself an extraordinary locution, it is only through language and, perhaps through music, that man can make free of time, that he can overcome momentarily the presence and presentness of his own punctual death. (1975: 161)

Was tomorrow absent also in Lisbon at the end of November 1935, the time of Pessoa’s own punctual death? His last words, written in English after he had already been taken to the Hospital de São Luís – “I know not what tomorrow will bring” – offer an ambivalent testimony. “At other times”, when the writing of *Antinous* was possible¹, intimate ecstasy used to bring about the hyperlocal sphere of belonging, a topological singularity isolated from the worldly reality – such as the ghostly and dismal city that Lisbon was to become in the third and fourth decade of the 20th century. The dream of a great man with strong fists was to come true in the dictatorship of Salazar, entering the Portuguese political stage in 1926 and becoming prime minister in 1932; Pessoa was present barely at the autocrat’s modest beginnings. The biography of the author of *Antinous* does not actually make of him one of the victims of the terror of History; rather someone living in its shadow, with the foreboding of “verbs killing time” that were yet to be uttered. Nonetheless, his maturity coincided with the advent of the right-wing tendencies and the ever-increasing longing for dictatorship. What is more, he was fully aware of being personally compromised with his time, as he was – heteronymically – the “neopagan” (and crypto-fascist) António Mora and a female victim of abuse that not only allows the violence to be repeatedly perpetrated on her, but also finds in it her intimate, masochistic satisfaction. Pessoa was able to understand the temptations of authoritarianism only too well; he was himself only too prone to love charismatic figures riding white Lusitano horses – such as Sidónio Pais whom he was ready to anoint as a “president-king” (*presidente-rei*).

IV.

The climate of Lisbon strangely coincided with that of Bucharest. At the opposite end of the European map, it was equally easy to find obscure longings, not only for power and dominance, but also for being overpowered and dominated. The fascist dream of an order based upon force finally materialized – the political polarity having switched – in the communist regime. Nonetheless, it may be regarded as symptomatic that the young Mircea Eliade, as he came to Lisbon, was immediately fascinated precisely by the figure of the Portuguese dictator. In his *Portugal Journal*, he drew his portrait in a florid style that may eventually seem grotesque to the present-day eye. In the note written on April 21st, 1941, Eliade admired the noble profile of the autocrat speaking to the crowds from a balcony as if in a sort of pagan ritual, a literal quotation from the days of decadence of the Roman empire:

¹ The poem was originally published in Lisbon, by Monteiro & Co, in 1918.

When he appeared, baskets of rose petals, red and yellow, began to be poured out from above. I noticed later, when a young man was speaking from a platform in the middle of the square, that Salazar was playing pensively with a few petals still left on the banister. I watched him, then, as he spoke. He read, warmly enough but without emphasis, lifting his eyes from the page at intervals and looking at the throng. He raised his left hand weakly, thoughtfully. A voice never strident. And at the conclusion of the speech, when those below were applauding, he inclined his head, smiling. Seemingly, he failed to be aware of the overwhelming, collective might at his feet. In any event, he was not their prisoner; the thought didn't even occur to him. (2010: 3-4)

Strangely, there seems to be once again a “parapet/ That looks upon the seas of future time”, belonging to the autocrat exclusively. The person Eliade describes is yet another emperor in his intimate bubble; the balcony and the banister where those few petals remained mark a rupture of spatial continuity between him and “those below”. The avalanche of roses poured from above seems to recreate the same kind of ephemeral space disruption as the pouring rain in the poem of Fernando Pessoa. But of course, Salazar must have been totally unaware of the particularity of that moment of suspended time, when someone else – an unknown young man, perhaps a Bithynian lover never to be, yet almost certainly a fan – was briefly speaking during the official rally. The maker of this bubble of intimacy is Eliade, not Salazar; he wraps the mediocre figure of the Portuguese tyrant in a poetical fiction that falls quite close of the world-making dreams in Pessoa's drama *O Marinheiro*. Affect and intimacy among rose petals were merely a projection of a desire, not quite articulate at that stage of Eliade's personal path, of a refuge out of History, nurtured by a seduced intellectual, recklessly in search of an imperial lover. The liberation from the spell of the multitude, that the dictator epitomizes momentarily, is a dream of the intellectual wishing to get rid of his own affective involvement in the throng, his own fascist sympathies and longings. What contradicts them, in the first place, is the desire of being singled out, and of living in a higher, more luminous reality, beyond the reach of the profane crowd and its vulgar affectivity. This is why Eliade is attracted by the image of apotheosis. But it is important to remember that dictator's autarchy in the bubble of that moment suspended in time, at the height of a balcony, corresponds to the symbolic construction of an intellectual, the maker of counter-histories, not of the autocrat himself, the maker of History. Their futile encounter is vaguely erotic, just as it is reckless, although not exactly in the connotation given to the word in Mark Lilla's book (2001). The fact they stand together on that balcony looking upon something qualitatively different from their own space and time is a phenomenon of the rim; it marks the point of topological intersection of surface and depth.

V.

The fate of Portugal under Salazar, the fate of the communist Romania, the fate of my native Poland under the same historical circumstances, even my own fate and my own exilic confrontation with the East-European history that seems so dangerously prone to repeat itself just as I write these words, certainly differ in many ways. The coincidence of leaders and lovers strikes me, nonetheless, as symptomatic. It is as repetitive as the individual situation of man, poet or thinker on the brink of personal participation in those intricate patterns of desire, seduction, History-making dreams and bereavement. The flight from the intimate microsphere of desire, that utterly brings about the terror of History, appears as logically impossible; it

would presuppose the flight from the innermost part of one's own being. This is precisely why the parapets' promise of a jump into an extra dimension proves to be so tempting.

Such questions as the engagement of Mircea Eliade and his generation in the Romanian fascism have been, in recent years, studied in an extensive and uncompromising way (cf. Laignel-Lavastine, 2002, as well as several other monographs). Yet, on the other hand, it is impossible to deny that such figures cannot be reduced to the tiny size of simple henchmen of the local fascism. In their exile, the generation of Eliade, Cioran and Ionesco produces not the escapees, but extracultural dispatiants², fully aware of the dangers and temptations inscribed in their time and the mental formation they received and in which they fully participated.

Remembering Eliade in a note included in the *Anathemas and Admirations*, Cioran mentions the desire of exerting an influence upon the direction of the historical events that haunted this Romanian generation (1991: 85). Yet, confronted with increasing experience, such a youthful illusion of efficiency and influence could not last long. The questions asked by History could not be answered in a satisfactory and uncompromising manner. To the contrary, the terror of local History, its placedness, producing even sharper, more strident tones in the remote corners of the European map, pressed them to seek refuge in the universal. While Pessoa dissociated into a plurality of voices, Eliade attempted to fly into the study of the universalism of religious beliefs and ideas. Against the conclusions that the comparison of the obvious grammatical rules might suggest, the universal languages, such as English for Pessoa, French for Cioran and Eliade, proved to be richer with inflections of the future tense than their native Portuguese or Romanian.

Pessoa neutralizes the inspirations of the far-right or integralist politics and ideologies through a cacophony of voices, dissociating into a nebula of heteronyms, that nonetheless included such figures as António Mora. Yet, such a voice as the latter was framed in the project of a great library in ruins, lost in the great acceleration of modernity – time of proliferating futures encroaching upon the present time of human life. Pessoa's collection of writings, vestigial in the famous *arva* (wooden chest) filled with loose pages and spare notes, gathers books fallen into oblivion before they could find their time of completion. The chaos of this abortive library, scattered since its beginnings, finds a paradoxical counterpart in the overflowing writings of Eliade, another library that was to fall victim of accidental flames in the United States. The common denominator between both of them is a constant switching between order, accumulation and chaos. At the same time, both Pessoa and Eliade seek refuge in complexity and plurality against the supreme intellectual temptation of the integrisms of all times: clarity, distinctness, unambiguity, lawfulness, simplicity and rule. Investing themselves in complexity, building multidimensional, polyhedron structures of themselves, bulging out of their local contexts, they try to liberate themselves from the mental burden of their provincial origins, the tiny circles hemming them in their marginal portions of the map. Not only do they strive to cut down their entanglement in the local affairs of their peripheral worlds, contaminated with the mediocrity inherent to all provincialisms, they also achieve intellectual excellence, that is a force pushing them to bulge out of their flat realities. Those extra dimensions of complexity in which they indulge introduce a promise of an intimate freedom in

² Dispatiant is a subject of dispatiation, defined by Adrianna Dagnino as “the transcultural process that may be triggered by moving – physically, virtually and imaginatively – outside one's cultural and homeland borders” (2012: 2).

a symbolic space bubble situated beyond the immediacy of History. The whole process may also be defined as a way of building their extracultural stance.

VI.

In the essay *Dom – na szczytach lokalności* (Home – on the heights of localness), a title derived from Cioran's "heights of despair", a Silesian *oikologist* (a philosopher of home) Aleksandra Kunce claims that it "it is a mistake to think that man becomes open when he abandons his homeliness and dissolves in what is worldly and universal (*ogólnoświatowe*). (...) We stare so fixedly into what is local, encircling, familiar, precisely to get strength for the confrontation with what is infinite and unbounded" (2013: 62). Adoption of an extracultural position, literary and intellectual dispatiation, implies not only a violent disruption of the homeland's discourse or writing in opposition to it. It is also a subtler process, aiming at the recuperation of the axiological microspheres located in the homeland, but available (open to conceptualization and verbalization) only from the level of the universals. An example of such a displacement of the intimate, microspheric axiology into the universal space is to be found in Czesław Miłosz's poem *Bypassing Rue Descartes*. The progress of the poetic discourse resumes the experience of individuation of "a young barbarian", singled out of a larger community sharing the same exilic fate in a "capital of the world": "We were many, from Jassy and Kolosivar, Wilno and Bucharest, Saigon and Marrakesh,/ Ashamed to remember the customs of our homes" (1983: 8).

The progress of History going on in the background is marked firstly by the enthusiasm of young revolutionaries and modernisers, wishing to abolish those shameful, anachronistic "customs of their homes", and secondly by their deaths and the coming to power of their peers, equally seduced by the "universal beautiful ideas" underpinning their regimes just as the Roman imperial imagery underpinned the Portuguese dictatorship of Salazar. The indifference of the "capital of the world", paying little attention to peripheral tragedies, is yet another element of the flat order of the map on which the great games of History are enacted. Once again, the singled-out subject, producing a topological singularity of symbolic space, is leaning against yet another parapet over an expanse of water: "Again I lean on the rough granite of the embankment,/ As if I had returned from travels through the underworlds/ And suddenly saw in the light the reeling wheel of the seasons/ Where empires have fallen and those once living are now dead" (8).

With the same, significant element of suddenness, translating the point of emergence of the extra dimension into a photic experience of illumination ("seeing in the light" in the minimalistic mysticism of the Polish poet), Miłosz's subject acquires a "clearer presence to himself" just as Pessoa's Hadrian.

Strolling along the Parisian Descartes street, Miłosz not only liberates himself from the intimate horror of History taking place in the peripheries, as depicted in his *Captive Mind*, but also from the limiting "Europeanness" represented by the metropolis. The emergent, de-centred, extracultural topology of "neither here nor anywhere else" (9) finds its fulfilment in an archaic, universal norm, situated in the depths of humanness that the illumination lays bare, rather than on the flat surface of History. Paris as the capital of the European empire of thought, epitomising the illusion of the "universal beautiful ideas", is utterly confronted with the microsphere of affect situated in a homeland as a remembrance of the childhood, brought about by the innermost recollection of a "heavy sin" and an intimate act of contrition: "As to my heavy sins, I remember one most vividly:/ How, one day, walking a forest path along a

stream,/ I pushed a rock down onto a water snake coiled in the grass./ And what I have met with in life was the just punishment/ Which reaches, sooner or later, everyone who breaks a taboo” (9).

It is the affective, extraterritorial and extracultural homeland that dictates – through the consciousness of transgression and guilt – the true law, unfalsifiable in the learned, culturally transmitted and culture-specific contents. This extracultural Lithuania is not to be situated among the controversial homelands of all those young barbarians gone astray. It is a non-place of “neither here nor anywhere else” where the only certitude and, utterly, the only secure access to a future tense may be found. The elemental relationship with the serpent constitutes, so to speak, the inversion of the lapse in the Paradise; the chthonic animal is not the adversary, but an unjustly harmed victim that appeals for contrition. The rest – like those Sorbonne teachings imparted to “young cannibals who, in the name of inflexible principles, butchered the population of Cambodia” that Miłosz mentions in a personal comment to his own poem (9) – belong to the slippery domain of doctrines and ideologies constantly patent in the flat History-making. Miłosz’s *Captive Mind* may be seen as a work in many ways analogous to Cioran’s *Anathemas and Admirations*, as it is yet another collection of individual case studies explaining the mistake of those who tried to get involved, exert an influence, direct the events, and nonetheless remained paralysed by some sort of essential incapability of circumventing History. In the attempt of getting out of this incapacitating logic, the intellectuals and poets presented here searched for a higher ground that would permit them to think – if not act – more efficiently, or at least see things “in the light”.

What I call extracultural stance is a solution to the conundrum of History, promoted by highly individualistic aspirations of transgressing the limitations of the inherited cultures, identities, ideologies. The stake of the extracultural endeavour is to find radical liberty and authenticity beyond all the learned, culturally transmitted, and thus locatable patterns of thinking and feeling; its price may be that of accepting Cioran’s “heights of despair”. The experience of mourning, bereavement, “travel through the underworlds” constitutes a leitmotiv and a common denominator. The extracultural condition is a state of radical self-alienation from the symbolic sphere shared with other individuals, a deliberate, strong-willed acceptance of the extreme solitude of the heights. Yet, the alternative is a perpetual imprisonment in the ever-repeating History of empires, ideologies, nations and authoritarianisms.

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