

Article

Beyond Literal Idolatry: Translating Theo-Logos from Judgment to Love

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Abstract: This article explores the capacity for narrating the name of God as a way to liberate the suffering of the world. The first section of this article offers a brief overview of Walter Benjamin's linguistic theory as it relates to the issue of literal idolatry. In the second section, the content of exploring Ricoeur's movement toward a poetic faith creates a formal anomaly in which his "byway" is something that may be crucial for readers or may be unnecessary: it speaks to the discontinuity and rupture enabled by incorporating silence into speech. The third section flows from the first and third, discussing the difficulty and importance of naming God as an embodied speech act. This looks at the particular situation of parables, including perspectives from Thomas Altizer and J. Hillis Miller. The fourth section focuses on the psychodynamic work of Jessica Benjamin as it models a way of bringing an embodied witness to the world in a performance of divine love.

Keywords: narrative theology; constructive theology; psychology and religion; social justice; love



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1. Introduction

This article is Part Three in a triptych of essays that explore the resources of narrative theology relative to the context of modern religious change and the issues created by what I call literal idolatry. As a triptych, each part shares formal similarities, and is both separable from but related to an argument that the entirety brings forth. Part One focused on the role of faith relative to the question of why it is difficult for religion to change its identity, and Part Two examined the role of hope relative to the unexplored potential of narrative theology as a particular mode of thinking.

This article, Part Three, explores the capacity for narrating the name of God as a way to liberate the suffering of the world. This begins with a brief overview of Walter Benjamin's linguistic theory as it relates to the issue of literal idolatry and follows with an exploration of Ricoeur's movement toward a poetic faith, focusing on how it creates a formal anomaly in which his "byway" becomes something that may be crucial for readers or may be unnecessary. It speaks to the discontinuity and rupture enabled by incorporating silence into speech. This leads to a discussion of the difficulty and importance of naming God as an embodied speech act, examining the particular situation of the parables, including perspectives from Thomas Altizer and J. Hillis Miller. The paper culminates with the psychodynamic work of Jessica Benjamin, showing how it models a way of bringing an embodied witness to the world in a performance of divine love. This essay is dedicated to Alison Jasper and David Jasper, for their loving generosity, hospitality, and support—from asking important questions to opening important opportunities. I am grateful.

2. Taking God's Name in Vain

Walter Benjamin's theory of language contrasts the proper function of naming in material community with language's misuse as literal idolatry. Literal idolatry misuses language by "overnaming" and "overprecision", which rely on nonsensuous similarities and lead to a feeling of disconnection from reality. Systems of guilt, fate, and morality are anchored in legal and religious institutions that become disseminated in language through

articulated assemblages. Language has a liberating potential, both in the dormant capacity of words and through the ways that metaphors can translate love and inspire the potential for a restoration of our original relational mode of being immersed in a vital community within the world.

2.1. *Literalism as a Problematic Alternative to Naming*

Language, when spoken properly, communicates by recalling its origin in tactile presence: this is why we say that we are touched or feel moved by a heartfelt expression. The conventional grasp of language, which emphasizes merely verbal exchanges, limits the sphere of what is communicated to the merely literal. Walter Benjamin (1978) argued that each thing, animate and inanimate, communicates something about what it is as it relates to its environment (p. 314). Believing that language is both creative and creation, word and name, he postulated that human speech, which named things “according to knowledge”, differed from an original divine language, which “made things knowable” (p. 323). This kind of knowledge emerged through a form of resonant presence that each thing echoed in its own way. For that reason, Benjamin believed that true names emerge through “material community”, which provided a form of direct contact with what things are.

Human language introduces a form of communication that is developmental. It begins by shifting from the material community to a “magical community”, which is purely mental and is symbolized by relying on the sense of sound, rather than touch (p. 321). This innovation generates a joy in community that arises through a ceaseless work of translation: each evolved language (Benjamin includes in this the language of things) exists as a “translation of all others”. Consistent with its origin in material presence, a true translation does not rely on “abstract areas of identity” that function based on symbolic relationships (the German term *das Buch* “is” the English term the book). Instead, a true translation adds knowledge to what was heard, and thus allows its repetition to evolve “an imperfect language into a more perfect one”. This means that the joyful function of human language is to express the language of things as a human language, which is “not only a translation of the mute into the sonic; it is also the translation of the nameless into name” (p. 326). Thus, ideally, the sound of human language liberates the underlying potential of what is tangibly present through a loving expression of that which awaits only its naming to be released. Such a naming indicates and thus foregrounds a contingent, temporary, and latent set of relations whose revelation in sound produces new possibilities moving forward.

The material community is infinite and varied. Human language loses touch with direct knowledge of this true reality. This results in a distorted relationship to language, as humans look to what mediates knowledge (symbols and sounds) rather than remaining attuned to a real connection. The fascination with the infinite possibilities of a purely mental world lead to two problematic stances relative to the same mistaken impression. Each view neglects language as a function designed to indicate relationships, and both confuse sounds with literal products. One error, the “bourgeois view”, flattens language to communicate merely “factual subject matter” based on the false belief that words are arbitrary and based on accidental connections to reality. The second error, the “mystical linguistic theory”, sees words as equivalent to the “essence of the thing” (pp. 317–18). Although the errors seem to contradict, both emphasize the human word rather than a relation to things as foundational to reality. This emphasis on how words create reality is the foundation of what is termed “literal idolatry” throughout this article.

2.2. *Evil and the Human Word*

A literal idolatry becomes possible when humans forget that what things are named differs from what they are. Such forms of communication limit and overdetermine the potentiality of the world, and thus distort the nature of reality. Two major problems emerge when the naming function in language *intentionally* distorts reality. First, the less capably human naming mirrors reality, the more seemingly powerful the namer becomes—an

apparent power that draws attention to how language describes reality and away from an innate, connected experience of it. Second, the gap between language and reality introduces a false sense of nothingness and suggests a metaphysics of presence produced in language (rather than reality) as a form of consolation. Rather than resolving this discomfort, the resulting metaphysics of presence reinforces the disconnection from a shared experience of reality.

One of the most damaging ways literal idolatry distorts reality is by naming good and evil. The first consequence of this misuse of language is the ability to concoct unreal experiences. Benjamin (1978) argues this in his reading of the exile from the creation that God had named “good”. Human judgments of moral good and evil are “the uncreated imitation of the creative word”, which trespasses beyond knowledge of what is to create names for what had not existed: good and evil. Moral judgments assert a “direct knowledge of good and evil” whose “magic is different from that of name, but equally magical” in its ability to awaken a sense of guilt (p. 327).

Literal idolatry also corrupts language. After the fall, language stops participating in the immanent community of things and becomes a mere sign: the immediate magic of judgment that invokes bad feelings of illusory guilt replaces the immediacy of true naming and the joyful liberation of real potential. Dislocated from the reality of its spoken situation, language becomes “the abyss of prattle” that at best parodies “the creative word of God” (p. 328). The unsupported position from which such human judgments emerge produce the loss of the “common foundation” of things and the originary material community. As Benjamin puts it, the “enslavement of language in prattle is joined by the enslavement of things in folly almost as its inevitable consequence”. (p. 329). In part, this enslavement occurs through a twinned tendency that perpetuates the ungrounded corruption of language: “over naming” things that now seem mute, and “overprecision” in communicating among humans.

Third, a literal idolatry requires a metaphysics of presence and places a sense of “I” as central to experience. This metaphysical approach supplements those enmeshed in the ungrounded world of moral judgments that relates to the dematerialized, merely mental infinite. Making one’s home in the abyss of signs results in a continuing inability to hear the language of things. Sundered from the direct relational communicative network of things, humans also lose touch with the God who preserves the objectivity of translations. This situation perhaps explains the hunger for a metaphysics of presence, the ongoing fascination with possessing objects and identity markers. Jerome Miller (1992) noted that a metaphysics of presence necessarily centers the self as the foundational axis of the world: “For I am the one being whose absence I can never experience; my presence is, in fact, the precondition for the possibility of anything being present”, thus “the I turns out to be the primary being who anchors the whole system, including the God who is present within it” (p. 185). The centrality of the “I” who judges is reinforced by the loss of a common foundation. Over naming and overprecision keep the “I” isolated by deterministically limiting the potentiality of what is near. The abyss of prattle keeps the “I” distracted from the more robust reality offered by things.

Correspondingly, literal idolatry generates the creation of “god” and religions that focus on this god to validate the use of moral terminology and disguise its ungrounded nature. Speaking from within the Christian tradition, Peter Rollins (2012) argued that such an idea of God is a fictitious Idol, a meaningless object of thought and empty name to which we attribute properties of the presence we desire. Categorical definitions such as “existence, meaning, and the sublime”, when made properties of God (an example of over naming), lead humans to forget that these are actually “ways in which we engage with the world . . . affirm the world in love” (p. 140). For Rollins, the importance of presence comes in our interactive tactile experiences. We affirm in love as we hold, contemplate, smell, touch, or hear the things in the world as they exist (p. 137), sensuous forms of engaged interaction that one cannot have with language concerning how to properly define the object “God”.

Because literal idolatry disrupts us from feeling connections to reality, it results in language that maintains this disconnection. The “I” may be held central in language, but is imprisoned in an unreal context. Benjamin (1978) argues that after losing its capacity for producing similarities through the language of nature, language increasingly relies on unreal and arbitrary connections. The relationship connecting spoken and written words or that translate one language to another is based on “nonsensuous similarities” (pp. 333–35). The nonsensuous results, taken as reality, provide a new and unreal basis for human actions in the world. Combined with the implicit embrace of the “I” as the central presence in the world and the absence of a God whose word infuses a more expansive sense of language, words become an end in themselves. This is *literal idolatry*. It embraces nonsensuous similarities and thereby reinforces the isolation of the self within a world of judgment, opinion, and lack of relationship.

2.3. *The Curse of Human Language: Guilt, Fate, Morality*

Problematically, the use of human language to create a falsely empowering mental world uses literal idolatry to create a self-supporting structure dislocated from relationships in reality. These emerge as theological narratives that use the fallen language described by Benjamin (1978, pp. 306–8) and amplify the judging function that disconnects both the speaker and the spoken-to from the rich immediacy of their surroundings. Stories that are born of this abstracted judgment create *fate*, “the guilt context of the living”. The guilt context, isolated from any felt mimetic connection to natural relationships, is perpetuated by a “moral order of the world” based on the convergence of human institutions of religion and law. As evidenced in the Ten Commandments, the origin of law not only determined human interaction, but also prescribed how humans would interact with their gods. Arguing that “fateful moments exist only in bad novels” (p. 308), Benjamin argued against any sort of deterministic vision of the future; problematically, such visions proliferate due to the disjunctive and judgmental stories that convey the guilt context of the living through systems that construct a moral order. Fate, guilt, and conventional morality perpetuate the corrupt and destructive system of literal idolatry.

Judgments produced by systems of religion and law collaborate in producing metaphysical agreements that allow for prejudgments of some humans as “less than” based on observable characteristics. These agreements have consequences beyond the merely mental world of abstracted ideas. Alexander Weheliye (2014, pp. 49–50) described this power of speech as “preferred articulations” that insert historically sedimented power imbalances and ideological interests, which are crucial to understanding mobile structures of dominance such as race or gender, into the “modus operandi of assemblages”. The resulting “articulated assemblages” use longevity and tradition to obscure their lack of true foundation. In reality, articulated assemblages use arbitrary distinctions as though they named a true essence, a perverse convergence of bourgeois and mystical language theories. As a consequence, “racializing assemblages [etch] abstract forces of power onto human physiology and flesh in order to create the appearance of a naturally expressive relationship between phenotype and sociopolitical status”. Judgment is incarnated. Word becomes flesh: “legal and extralegal fictions of skin color and other visual markers obscure, and therefore facilitate, the continued existence and intergenerational transmission of the hieroglyphics of the flesh”. Nonsensuous similarities become reality.

One example of articulated assemblages comes through the emphasis on ownership that dominates how conventional morality discusses freedom. The assemblage connects the metaphysical concept of “property” with philosophical ideas of personhood and the economic pursuit of commodities. The purported benefit of living in this world is to become relieved of cares, but what actually results is an isolating world of stagnation. Freedom is unrestricted access to *having* things, rather than the liberating *being* with them. Jennifer C. Nash (2019, p. 125) noted that “As it is currently structured, property deeply organizes sociality, and law operates to protect property from trespass and theft. Thus, law operates to create categories such as property holder (owner) and trespasser (thief), and to

organize the social world around proximities to ownership". Rather than using this freedom towards the joyful liberation of things through enriched connection, it remains "centered on its narrowly liberal formulations, which stressed personal choice, nonintervention, and rugged individualism" (Zamalin 2019, p. 105). Those who remain bound to objects, whether material "goods" or abstract "rights", are not freed by their inscription into this articulated assemblage. These assemblages replace a felt connection of loving care with an ongoing feeling of anxious worry (Thoreau 2008).

The social order perpetuates unchosen damages for those whose relationship to articulated assemblages are predetermined as being worth less than others based on traditions of arbitrary judgments. In *Becoming Human*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) argued from the perspective of epigenetic research, detailing how DNA structures possess genetic potential that presents differently depending on environment and social processes.

We not only inherit genes from our parents, we also inherit a system that regulates their expression, revealing or concealing our genetic potential. This system is called an *epigenome*, and is commonly likened to volume controls for our genes. The controls, called *marks*, can turn on or off, to quiet or amplify genetic potential. *Therefore, our genetic potential is not determined by any present or fixed program but is instead modulated by an epigenome which is highly responsive to social and environmental prompts.* Moreover, our genes possess potential, including pathogenic potential, that may very well go unexpressed depending upon our social and environmental experiences; the reverse is also true, as social and environmental toxins may initiate disease processes that could have otherwise gone unexpressed (p. 200).

This discloses how our bodies respond to both articulated assemblages of the social world as well as the material community of the natural environment. This responsive quality of our genetic potential provides an additional explanation for why diseases flourish in communities deprived of relative economic parity beyond unjust lack of resources perpetuated in the present. Jackson names in particular how antiblackness is "in fact a nonrelational form of relationality" (p. 204). Moral judgments, imposed by conventional religion and morality, lead to disintegration. They replace natural forms of connection with ungrounded moral judgments that create feelings of anxiety, guilt, and worry.

Authority is invested in those who claim responsibility over articulated assemblages: it is a privileged form of authorship. The use of metaphor, which is closer to Benjamin's sense of language that led to spontaneously voicing connections, provides a way to rewrite how things are wrongly named, shifting authorship and thus authority. "[I]t is possible to reconfigure established metaphors, including those that militarize disease . . . such a potentiality is a matter of survival as language is a crucial terrain upon which war is fought" (Jackson 2020, p. 192). Reclaiming the territory of language, especially to undermine oppressive systems of guilt, shame, and other judgments, provides one useful avenue for creating healthier environments.

2.4. The Redemptive Potential of Metaphoric Language

Art is a metaphoric form of expression, a work of human naming that expresses an opportunity for reconnection. At the very least, art has historically been useful in allowing people to access dormant sensitivities that are then freed to pursue reimagined forms of relational justice. Art supplies symbols and metaphors that invite creative engagement with the world, including the potential for speaking a new word and thus projecting the possibility of a new world into existence. At one level, this occurs at the level of beauty, whose symmetry trains us to pay attention to harmonious relations at all levels (Scarry 2000). It also inspires a return to a sensory imagination; Robin D. G. Kelley (2003, p. 51) noted, in a discussion of jazz music in general and Sun Ra in particular, "Black radicals forced the white Left to see and hear differently, and they and a few white rebels heard in the sounds and movements and writings the birth of a utopian future rising out of the abyss of racism and oppression". It is for this reason, perhaps, that Jackson (2020, p. 214) stated that her work is a statement of faith, "the belief that if history is processual and

contingent, then art holds the potential of keeping possibility open or serving as a form of redress. In other words, art can be a remedy and may be a means of setting right a wrong”.

Benjamin was also aware of the potential for art and metaphor to reintroduce an accurate, liberating experience of reality. The languages of sculpture, painting, and poetry are less likely to engage in overnaming or in overprecision: they invite relationships. Benjamin (1978) called this “a translation of the language of things into an infinitely higher language” (p. 330). Communications of an artful nature, more sensuous, invite witnesses to connect through touch, sound, or sight. Even poetry can translate experience into exquisite beauty: word can still awaken humans to a sense of profound wholeness that reintroduces our affinity with the things nearby. Further, even ordinary words retain a connection to the original function of naming. As Owen Barfield (2007) described it, “the common words we use every day” presents the souls, thoughts, and feelings of the past “not dead, but frozen into their attitudes like the courtiers in the garden of the Sleeping Beauty”. Barfield convincingly showed that “[t]he more common a word is and the simpler its meaning, the bolder very likely is the original thought which it contains and the more intense the intellectual or poetic effort which went into its making (p. 18). Human language still carries the capacity for translation.

Not only that, but humans retain the ongoing potential to hear and translate the language of nature by experiencing concrete similarities through the power of metaphor and relational modes of thought. In *Angels Fear*, Bateson and Bateson (1987, pp. 190–93) described metaphor as a form of communication that bridges epistemology and ethics—how we know what is true and how we should treat others. The ground of both, they argued, is love. They defined love as a “three-way metaphor that links self and other and also *self plus other*”, which generates a recognition that can “assert the value of the relationship as well as the value of self and other”. This understanding of love provides a generative model for how to restore a loving feeling of interconnectedness that is both restorative and creative.

Experiencing how one part relates to the whole opens a path to understanding coherence at another level. Thus, as a synecdochical form of relationship, metaphor is more generally useful for a “description consisting of multiple parts which is nevertheless *unified*, with a logical organization which in some way models the complexity of organization in living systems”. In this way, metaphor is *mimetic*. The Batesons argued that the importance of an extended metaphor, story, comes in its elaboration and its temporal framing in terms of narrative. A rose or a conch shell can be the basis of a metaphor—but both contain stories and both are constructed of multiple parts built on related ground plans. As with so many soap operas and heroic epics, the successive stories prove to be the same story, with small variations. It is because a metaphor has multiple parts that we can use it to think with to gain a better experiential understanding, deepening the potential for love.

The first step to creating a metaphoric connection through love requires an initial grounding in a loving appreciation for the self as constituting a relationship. For the Batesons, the self-relation of psyche and soma provides a foundational experience of relationships from which we can connect to the rest of the world. This internal relationship is central “to the net of metaphor through which we recognize and respond to the world”. Self-knowledge provides “a model for understanding another, because of similarities or congruences that make the knowing possible”, in sympathetic and empathetic relation. One suspects that metaphor, related through an appropriate self-knowledge, provides the most useful form of translation and the most accurate form of naming. Healthy self-relation becomes the foundation for love.

Second, learning this kind of way of seeing the self as the relational process of connecting soma and psyche can serve as a metaphor for appreciating metaphoric connections to others. The combination of acknowledging difference and appreciating connection emerges in a felt closeness to the natural realm, preserving “the communicative web” that knits together the more-than-human world. Their ideal was a language that consisted solely of “differences and relationships”, enabling a sensible and sensory engagement

that foregrounded recognition of “our affinity with the rest of the world and deal with it ethically and responsibly”. The ability to communicate in terms of relations and differences works against the metaphysics of presence that center the “I”, against the appropriation of divine function by contravening abstract moral judgments, and against the overnaming and overprecision that creates “nouns” as objects and facts.

Practice at relating self and other in a loving way (whether person or lake) at a practical level of relations provides the metaphorical scaffolding to understand the relationship of love and metaphor at a conceptual level. The Batesons claimed that this provided a communicative framework: religion, art, interpersonal relationships, dreams, visions, and the imagination provided a semantics based in difference and a syntax that remained “sensitive to metaphor”. Of these, the Batesons believed that religions remain capable of performing a vital human work to the extent that they embrace their status as a metaphor, offering “systems—mental models—that one can enter” to find a “rich, internally structured model that stands in metaphoric relation to the whole of life”, rather than a mental idea of God, “and therefore can be used to think with” (Bateson and Bateson 1987, p. 195). The “with” understands the model as a relational part of an ongoing process, rather than an “answer”. This metaphoric basis of religion, when undertaken as a creative and mimetic action grounded in love, provides a portal that allows human access to the interwoven communication network of self, others, and concepts. Entry through this liberating portal returns humans to their initial naming capacity, which added knowledge to the experience of what is and used language to liberate these potentials.

Religions that engage in literal idolatry tend to rely on overprecision to encourage systems of justified true beliefs and other merely mental notions that lead people away from, rather than closer to, the heart of reality. This reality would embrace the God that emerges without being overnamed with descriptors such as “existing, sublime, and meaningful” but instead occurs within a work of love. Such a God becomes “the source that calls everything into existence . . . all the while defying objectification” (Rollins 2012, p. 137–40). Rather than abstracting love from a felt interconnection with what is around, loving is central to meaningful experience as it makes things matter without asking for an ideological commitment. Although the idol, “which seems meaningful until grasped”, may position itself as standing out from the world to gain devotion, in reality when “we lay down the idea of God as meaningful and find the world infused with meaning, we bear witness to the meaningfulness of the divine” (p. 139). Rollins, like the Batesons, finds that love’s heart is metaphor, “a refusal of worldly wisdom in that it lives ‘as if.’ Not engaging in some philosophical discussion about whether this nihilistic view of the world is right or wrong”, which would be debated in the emptiness of merely mental language, “but embracing the world as that which is radiant, sacred, and sublime”. Love enriches experiences of the world, participating in a metaphoric reality that engages with one’s immediate sensuous surroundings and opens up the potential of restorative reconnection.

3. The Resurrection of the Dead Metaphor

Human language retains its energetic charge, although revitalizing it requires a more complete understanding that would allow someone to enter the metaphoric portal described by the Batesons. This loving portal would equip someone to use metaphor as a way to restore connection to self, others, and religion through a felt communicative awareness. A clearer understanding of this emerges with an introductory examination of how literal idolatry leads language to lose its charge. The way to restore the capacity of language to connect requires moving downward, burrowing into the darkness of silence, and reconnecting with the felt presence of reality. Doing this allows for the development of one’s inner senses that equip speakers to infuse the power of silence, the unspoken and unsayable, to become part of what is summoned by one’s speech. Following this path allows speakers to move from a speech that says nothing to a silence that says everything and a form of poetic faith. By embodying each part of the “third” the Batesons described, speakers can reintroduce the power of love into the material community. After learning

how to revitalize language, it will be possible to consider how figures of speech might enable people to potentially know God.

3.1. How Metaphors Die

People living in the present were born into a world of fallen language made flesh and inscribed in the laws and buildings that govern reality. Although art can lead to a more sensory reality, shepherded by visionaries who see the sorts of relational metaphors that contribute to a more loving and embedded inhabitation of the world, such moments tend to be most impactful in a sense of *now*. Although it seems both necessary and possible to reimagine the world away from the one governed by *literal idolatry* and fixed by preferred articulations of hierarchical assemblages, and despite the continued work of anticaptivity theorists and visionary artists, we remain in a world in which the value of life, joy, and love are disregarded in the pursuit of an illusory sense of freedom through consumerism. In such a world, organized around hierarchical assemblages held in place by stories of religion and law and embodied in the flesh of its citizens, any sense of “progress” seems tainted. To learn how to follow Jackson’s directive and rewrite the dominant narratives, it is important to understand how corrupt naming processes work.

For Benjamin, creating allowed for an originary fusion of Being and *logos*, while naming invited humans to an ongoing participatory relationship with the creation. As Kühlewind noted in *The Logos-Structure of the World* (Kühlewind and Lipson 1993), our naming capacity arises because our insights (p. 41) and perceptions (p. 82) are both interwoven with concepts. The naming capacity allows the world to speak with humans: naming expresses our experience of what the world exposes. An apt name gathers together an insightful appreciation of what is occurring. By adding knowledge to what presents itself, recognition through *logos* liberates distinct potentialities of what is. When the gathering capacity of *logos* is used to create a symbol, it brings together a constellation of word–sound, word–image, universal concept, and particular thing. Using a symbol when naming activates a level of understanding. As Robert Scharlemann (1991, p. 75) wrote, “Everything that is anything at all is a singular (‘this’) and a universal (‘kind of thing’) in one, and the one is understood as the ‘being’ of that thing. To understand is to think of a thing *as* the kind of thing it *is*”. Problematically, “we approach the perceptual world like a meditative sentence we read only for its informational content” (Kühlewind and Lipson 1993, p. 104) as a result of literal idolatry, which obscures the fullness of our experience of natural expression.

Naming a thing in metaphor invites a different form of understanding: it names what a thing is *like*. A metaphor brings to the foreground part of a thing’s latent potential by relating the being of the thing to an innovative context. The addition of *logos* relates the singular thing to a new universal concept, augmenting the “being” of the thing by thinking of it *as if* it were a kind of thing it *is not*. This act provides an alchemical fusion in which some of the vitality innate in Being but absent in concepts becomes the power of presence in word, and whereby the unconditioned nature of the universal infuses the momentary particular. It liberates both *logos* and Being by highlighting (and not extracting) the latent potential that always remains dormant beneath what is actual.

After *logos* is corrupted in the processes that Benjamin described as overnaming and overprecision, the liberating potential of naming becomes imprisoning through the literal, reductive identification of Being as *logos*. Relative to Scharlemann’s framework, overnaming would refer to the inappropriate enhancement of the concept, understanding Being as a quality of the universal apart from its relationship to a particular. Overprecision would refer to the impoverishment of particulars that are dislocated from their whole context and are reduced to objects. In this way, Being and *logos* are confused. Literal idolatry reifies this process by exclusively seeing Being as related to universal concepts and disregarding the potentiality of the interconnected things in the surrounding environmental context.

The “dead metaphor” is an example of this process. It refers to when what once was a metaphor becomes understood as the literal name for a thing. Language exhausts its charge by imprisoning things as part of an articulated assemblage and then extracts the

vitality of the thing to send along the network. Conversations that carry on articulated assemblages in this way both constitute and contribute toward a diminution of both *logos* and Being. It uses the naming power to imprison life rather than to free it.

As an example, consider what once was a living metaphor. Referring to a “cliff face” at one point perhaps allowed someone to access the presence of a mountain in a reverent way, sensing its capacity for relationship as an active co-creator of the environment. Using “face” to name this environment contextualized a particular within the category of an unfamiliar sort of universal. Doing so enriched the experience of the world and expanded the category of “face” to include non-animal presences. The result perhaps invited a deeper curiosity about the world and one’s relation to it, offering a kind of vulnerable regard. *Logos* gathered the situation in a way that would allow the hiker to move more deeply into the Being of the moment.

A dead metaphor uses the same phrase in a different way. Two hikers discussing at a “cliff face” as a way to describe their situation allows one hiker to signal the object in question and in this way prevent either person from needing to point and look at the stone and its still, exposed, visage. The term itself, written or spoken, gathers as a totality what is actually an incomplete aspect of the whole. It simultaneously hides the living truth of its dynamic particularity, and neglects the actual power of *logos* to provide enhanced understanding.

3.2. *Experiencing the Darkness of Wordless Silence*

One of the functions of *logos* is to illuminate the potential of what is. The Enlightenment provided the apotheosis of fallen language and has not only retained its grasp on how humans experience the world but has also engaged in epistemicide and the elimination of other forms of knowing. It successfully and systematically revealed the possibilities of experiencing the world through an abstracted lens that separated subjects and objects. Before embracing a new form of speaking, it is necessary to turn away from this source of illumination. This is the movement from knowledge (the facts illuminated by the corruption of *logos*) to faith.

Ricoeur offered a description of this movement in the conclusion of his essay “Religion, Atheism, and Faith” (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007). He usefully articulated how a faith shorn of the corrupt elements of religion involves a different relationship to language. His description of corrupt elements (protection and condemnation) is wholly consistent with Benjamin’s analysis of fate and guilt. Ricoeur argued that leaving behind idols that hold knowledge in place would require moving through a new “night of the soul” (p. 460), toward a “tragic faith” that persists “beyond all assurance and protection” (p. 455), into a fuller sense of belonging. The movement from resignation to dwelling moves through four main steps, each of which obtains a different level of recognition through an increasingly appropriate relationship to language.

Ricoeur described faith in the conditional: it occurs when nothing is certain. With a tone of longing, Ricoeur imagined a prophetic preacher capable of announcing this faith, admitting “at times, I hear his voice”, which beckons him to depart from the straight path of rational philosophy to venture on “a road that has gone astray”, found by “digging deeper” (p. 460). These images refuse a triumphant forward narrative movement. This faith does not move forward: it burrows downward. It does not see truth; it listens in darkness. It is a journey toward mystery rather than enlightenment.

The imagined renewal of faith is structurally similar to a metaphorical movement. Both demand resisting the urge to move forward along a narrative vector, turning one’s back to a *logos* that offers a certain kind of illumination toward a center that one does not occupy. Ricoeur (1976) described the paradoxical core of a metaphor, which “gives poetic discourse a centripetal direction opposed to the centrifugal direction, which characterizes descriptive and didactic discourse” (pp. 67–68). The centrifugal pressure of the plot keeps readers looking toward the horizon of the future, destabilized and uncentered. Narratives inherently prevent a sense of total presence. A metaphor, given in a glance, requires a

reader to pause and move backward from description to term, staying stilled between the two. The gap between term and discourse presents an unknown: dwelling here, Ricoeur suggested, might free humans from the heritage of accusation and prohibition.

Archetypal psychology describes this process as the search for a “black sun”, an alternative to the process of mortification (Marlan and Rosen 2015; Corbin and Pearson 1994) that seems an ingredient to heroic narratives. This step appears necessary for moving away from the emphasis on fate and guilt, accusation and protection, which corrupt the potential for living meaningfully through the influence of literal idolatry. Inasmuch as this reversal is a turning away from language and its structures of meaning, it involves a time of silence. Robert Sardello (2009) describes the role of silence in the process of transformational individuation:

Silence bears the wholeness we keep looking for while we do not know exactly what we are looking for. It is around us and within us. It goes to the deepest depths of the soul and to the outermost reaches of the cosmos and continually unites the two at the centering place of our heart. Here we discover the power of re-creation” (p. 8).

An awareness of the “luminous darkness of Silence” deepens as one engages in a “backward review” of one’s life (p. 88). Benjamin, too, believed that the tragic collapse of the conventional world and its gods would result in an individuating silence. The tragic realization that calls to one’s inner voice (genius) “robs [us] of speech, remains unspoken. Without declaring itself, it seeks secretly to gather its forces” (Benjamin 1978, p. 307). This inability to express language, depicted in Kierkegaard’s Abraham and Melville’s *Bartleby*, marks a liminal space in which one is positioned to hear a new language without yet having the ability to speak it.

Ricoeur heeded an inner voice, genius, heralded in silence. Linda Sussman (1995) described inner speech as a resource that summons humans to an individuated and unique destiny that differs from the tragic fate of narratives anchored in a fallen language. Heeding inner resources is a choice made beyond compulsion, without obvious rewards to gain or punishment to avoid, and represents the first part of the journey to “becoming free”. For Sussman, freedom requires a capability of questioning and choosing ethical conduct in all action. It also requires imagination, which “is never reached by knowing where one is going: one knows one is in the right place only after one has arrived” (pp. 55–59). This sense of freedom is augmented through an additional consequence of silence: developing “new sensitivities, new sense-abilities”, including heightened perception, “*seeing* instead of just looking . . . *listening* instead of just hearing”. Sussman connected these new capabilities to a new understanding of language:

The eyes of the heart do not find nouns in the world, but verbs. The heart is moved because it perceives the world as moving and gesturing. The verbalizing heart orients itself not by labeling and declaring the independent, isolated existence of objects but, as Russell Lockhart suggests, by joining the dance of interrelationship that verbs presuppose.

With Lockhart, Sussman indicts the tendency of a fallen language to name things in ways that indicate a sense of distance and hierarchy (p. 99). The “inner organs” that develop (Corbin and Pearson 1994; Sussman 1995) provide access to an “is” that emphasizes dynamic relationality rather than static being.

After one is opened through an awareness of new inner faculties, after turning away from the promised illumination of *logos* and the plots, fates, and narratives that have circumscribed life, what emerges is indeed something different. Engaging openly with this experience provides an encounter with resources capable of replenishing language. Erich Neumann described this orientation to experience as both “unitary reality” and the world of the “Great Experience”. Arguing that this “non-fallen world . . . is always accessible”, Neumann further argues that it is “where the difference between great and small, correct and incorrect vanishes, because the personal becomes transparent as the

transpersonal, and the transpersonal limits itself to the personal. This self-limitation to the personal makes possible a return to the world's wholeness as experienced in every individual" (Neumann 2017, p. 260). Experiencing the non-fallen world provides a way of reviewing life beyond "the ego's experience of chaos". Doing this alters the very nature of experience, which "melts to an eternal moment, in which no path and no order are visible to the walker, because no more time is visible, but only the meaningfulness of the present moment" (Neumann 2017, p. 261).

3.3. The Integration of Silence

Ricoeur imagined that the journey toward a poetic faith required four steps, the first two of which offer alternative resources to those projected by law and religion as the moral order of the world. The first step, "obedience without fear" (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007, p. 462), occurs in relation to the frame of wholeness allowed by silence. Silence enables recognition of the whole truth of one's place within a total context through a mode of passive acceptance, in a "wordless presence" (Moore 2020, p. 123). This post-ethical form of obedience comes through a specific relation to language: the Latin terms *ob* (to, for) *audire* (hear) form the etymological foundation for this kind of obedience. This kind of obedience comes when you hear your name and your attention instantly shifts in a total way as you focus on the summons. This points to the continuing capacity of original language to invite us to inhabit contexts in a totally present fashion. By receiving one's situation in this way, one focuses simply on what is without judging its relative goodness/badness or considering questions of fault or blame.

Ricoeur argued that the second step is "consent beyond desire", which would replace corrupted forms of consolation. Enhanced sensitivity allows one to attain the capability of active consent to the total situation. Ricoeur advised that the affirmation of consent here indicates a willing unification of "is" and "ought", that avoids regressing to the nostalgic stage before the naming of evil and also refuses a reformation of an "ethical" stage that imposes a sense of "good" as a moral world order. The enhanced sensitivity invests the "is" with a sense of dynamic relationality, and the "ought" with the ability to perceive and honor that goodness which exists. The language "beyond desire" does not suppose a violation of volition (against desire); instead, it suggests an ability to affirm one's presence within a total context that one has participated in bringing about even though it contains elements that are either not ideal (the judgment no longer protects a nominalized sense of self) or were totally unanticipated (the world beyond the imaginable). Ricoeur found that this stage marked the "move from the desire for protection to the act of consent" (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007, p. 462). Consenting to a situation opens a willingness to share responsibility for the nature of what is and for what emerges. Finally, the simple "yes" of total consent presents an initial opportunity to speak as a full participant within a larger, integrated context beyond dualisms of inside/outside, right/wrong, subject/object.

Crucially, both obedience and consent go beyond the ideal of a "being" or a form of "presence" that corresponds to the god who anchors literal idolatry. According to Thomas Altizer (1990), after one confronts totality, "the only real actor and power is a totally anonymous power". One can only coincide with this kind of power, but doing so requires relinquishing an understanding of "I" as a temporal, narratable self. This is consistent with the existential turning back that paralleled the process of finding meaning in a metaphor. As Altizer put it,

Now our world is a totality as it has never been so before, but a totality from which we are absent, or absent as individual and interior wills, or wills which can actually know either freedom or bondage. The disappearance of an interior freedom or bondage is the dissolution of self-consciousness, the erosion or annulment of that "I" or center of consciousness . . . (p. 100).

The sense of ongoing relational totality constitutes an immense and expansive "is" that discloses the superficial sense of "will" and the inadequacy of one's sense of "self" that preceded reversal. Becoming dislodged from an inadequate sense of "I" through an

immersion in and embodiment of silence provides the capacity for total speech. This is why Altizer (1987) argued “The speech of total speech is itself a self-transcendence of all self-identity” (p. 83) and “... self-identity can be itself only in silence, a silence which is actual, and a silence which is enacted in speech”. This transcendence of self-identity and the enacting of silence in speech parallels what Ricoeur describes as “consent beyond desire” because totality cannot be reduced to an individual will, and all that remains is the willingness to speak silence: “That silence which is the final self-enactment of self-identity is a silence which actually dawns, which actually occurs. And it occurs in its enactment, in that act and in those acts wherein speech silences itself” (Altizer 1987, p. 89).

This silence is not ephemeral, but remains materially anchored in the particular presence of the body. The body provides a point of reference within the totality and, because it follows the transcendence of self-identity in silence, constitutes an uncorrupted experience of psyche and soma—the basis of metaphoric relations per the Batesons. Sussman (1995) describes how enhanced senses enwombed in silence allow a totally new relation to the self. The enhanced senses enable a person to “appreciate the world and all its phenomena as animate”, which “inevitably awakens wonder and respect for the silent mystery of one’s own body. Movement and rest; pulses and undulations; building up, tearing down—similar structural forms and mineral elements belong both to body and world and are confirmations that body and world belong to one another” (p. 101). This understanding of the basic structure of movement and rest provide a felt commonality with the rest of the world.

This material referent of identification differs from a localized, narrating-I view of the world that rejects the surface of the world as “other”, as well as a spirituality that would reduce the sense of self to an immaterial soul. In its place is a new way of attending to the vibrancy of the world, a rekindled metaphoric awareness. “[T]he world and one’s body are not vacuous and dumb but abound with speaking gestures that can be ‘read’ as wise, living texts”. Attuning to the body provides a point of access to the original speech of an unfallen language, the soundless language of things. The combination of silence and an expanded sensitivity enables one to “inwardly honor this silent speech of the world” with the caveat that “... this dialogue is never given, never guaranteed. [One] must actively re-create the conditions for it in each moment” (Sussman 1995, p. 101). This embodied dialogue, attuned to the felt seeming of the material community of things, provides a capacity for enacting this silent speech in language through a renewed form of expression.

Moving beyond desire allows for an embodied experience and expression of character as a pure totality. Benjamin (1978) believed that the freed figure of someone wholly attuned to the inner voice, *genius*, provided a total alternative to the “mystical enslavement to the guilt context” and “dogma of the natural guilt of human life” (pp. 310–11). Benjamin’s discussion of *genius* is consistent with Barfield’s discussion of the term. Barfield (2007) reminded his readers that *genius* is related to the Greek *daimonion*, initially “to bring into being” (relating to “genesis”, “ingenious”, “engine” as well as “Genie”), and that Romans used the term in relation to “a person’s tutelary spirit, or special angel attending him everywhere and influencing his thoughts and actions” (p. 209).

Ricoeur’s stage of active consent thus requires an embrace of one’s individuated genius, the inner voice that uniquely attunes a person to the anonymous power Altizer discusses. This embrace sidesteps the tragic world of guilt and locates character as something innate. In *The Soul’s Code*, James Hillman (2017) returns to Plato’s *The Myth of Er*, wherein a soul chooses a life according to its lot, but each soul also gains a “genius” that helps to determine the arc of its life: “the soul must be perceiving intuitively an image that embraces the whole of a life at once” and, in life, this becomes the pattern “that is always and continually being selected by your soul” (p. 45). Harkening back to this genius through taking responsibility for one’s character provides a pure foundation for freely creating one’s life that precedes questions of conventional guilt. This kind of understanding is consistent with Ricoeur’s “consent beyond desire” because it coincides with an acceptance of both character and

circumstance, allowing a deepened responsibility for one's life without succumbing to the distractions of guilt or blame.

3.4. Poetic Faith: Dwelling beyond Tragedy

Ricoeur finds that a new stage, *dwelling* in language, arrives after completing these first two transitional steps. It is a new stage because it presumes a capacity for total involvement that presupposes but surpasses the first steps of resignation to silence and consent beyond desire. In describing this advanced stage, Ricoeur noted the "gathering force of the *logos*" (as an entirety) that surpasses the "emergence of the will to power" (p. 464) (limited to an individual perspective) allows obedience and consent to emerge from a total relation to the situation of language as such. Obeying the summons to *logos* and affirmatively consenting to Being (the situation that is, what presents itself) opens the passage from the world of individual tragedy to the world of dwelling in belonging. This is the stage where the "quality of perception endows metaphor with 'life'" (Sussman 1995, p. 158). The courageous willingness to descend into silence enables the resurrection of the dead metaphor, the death of the literal idol, and thus opens a time when "a symbol of being must begin to speak" (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007, p. 467).

Dwelling contains two modes: thinking and saying. Thinking is the "experience of what passes", while saying is the "expression of what surpasses" (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007, p. 464). The former allows *logos* to preserve Being, creating a memory that can be called to mind. The latter invites *logos* to expand Being, by naming or invoking latent possibilities not currently available. The thoughtful preservation of an experience gives birth to an appreciation of categories (kinds of things): categorical terms supply word concepts that allow us to identify and greet similar entities. Poetic enhancement of what is present equips humans to once again engage in the act of *true naming* in alignment with Benjamin's originary form of language: the addition of knowledge to what is. This form of dwelling engages in Sussman's sense of expanded sensitivity and attunement to one's identity with a material reality and provides a form of expression that parallels the articulation of character channeled through one's inner genius—an imaginal voice. The addition of this third, the inner voice, provides a metaphoric experience of self-in-self (*genius* in relation to psyche and soma) that provides the metaphoric groundwork that the Batesons described in terms of love as a relational third.

Both thinking and saying are altered through this experience of reversal. An appreciation for the inner senses suggests how a necessary stage in poetic dwelling would include the *experience of what surpasses*, going beyond just attending to what ordinary sensory engagement would register. Scharlemann (1991) provides an initial way to conceptualize this possibility. He distinguishes between *thinking* and *thanking* as each relates to German idioms for presence (*es ist* and *es gibt*) rendered as "there is" and "it gives". He posited that thinking involves the *understanding* mode of relation appropriate to presence, while thanking supplies the *grateful* mode of relation appropriate to donation (p. 69). Thinking would thus attend to the experience of what passes, and thanking to the experience of what surpasses. Scharlemann added that thanking allows "happiness to be known to us", and that "In the act of thanking, what is disclosed to us is the 'gloria Dei,' which is what we see when we experience the transparency (*Transparenz*) of the world" (p. 71). Thinking connects elements "positively by reference to a ground" (Being), according to a dialectical process, while thanking connects elements "marvelously by reference to nothing but time" (p. 74). The marvelous mode of grateful understanding eschews the possibility of literal idolatry inasmuch as it relies wholly on the marvelous coincidence of elements that appears—as well as that which donates their interconnected dance. Beyond any possible human effort of orchestration, all one can add to this marvel is grateful notice. This understanding correlates with Ricoeur's discussion of language at this stage, "When speaking becomes saying or, rather, when saying resides within the speaking of our language, we experience language as a gift, and we experience thought as a recognition of this gift. Thought gives thanks for the gift of language . . ." (Ricoeur and Ihde 2007, p. 465). This step provides

the experiential grounding for the third part of the Batesons' process, metaphor as concept, which anchors world creating models such as religion.

Another way to conceive of this "experience of what surpasses" relates to Neumann's description of "unitary reality", which cannot actually be "known" by the creative people who encounter it. Such people cannot grasp it but instead are "seized and possessed by it": even when they help to "fashion and develop [such intuitive experiences], with the full cooperation of [the] conscious mind", their overwhelming character is always a "significant element" (Neumann 2017, p. 103). Neumann argued that the unitary reality is necessarily expressed by a symbol, but that "A true symbol cannot be reduced to one of these two opposites; nor is it the sum of both. There is something more in it: there is an overflowing life by which the totality of [people are] embraced and possessed" (p. 105). This "something more" that exceeds the capacity of thought correlates with the marvelous connection Scharlemann described.

To experience what surpasses in joyful material community with the things nearby would naturally induce one to express this in an appropriate act of creative naming in the moment. This is a spontaneous form of expression that interrupts the chain of articulated assemblages. Altizer (1980, pp. 2–12), writing through the lens of Christian theology, offered one of the most robust discussions of embodied speech and total presence. His focus was on the nature of the parable, where "Word speaks finally because Word irreversibly becomes 'flesh.'" Parable is "present only in its enactment, only in its telling or saying", because writing "stills the sound of speech by breaking up and dismembering a vertical immediacy into a horizontal presence", a distinction that recalls the contrast between centripetal (vertical immediacy and Ricoeur's depths) and centrifugal (narrative) force. This latter force is what propels the lethal consequences for language and things.

The refusal of "horizontal presence" also allows parable to provide an alternative to myth. While both parable and myth "conjoin the world and the sacred and each establishes a continuum between human and cosmic identity", Altizer (1980, pp. 5–6) argued that the language of myth "distances both the speaker and the hearer from the moment or center of voice", by articulating "a center which is everywhere", whereas parables present a voice from a center that "is everywhere only by being here and now". Embodied parabolic speech "contracts attention into 'the presence or moment at hand' by emphasizing 'auditory as opposed to a visual presence' that 'speaks an immediate presence' even when reading. It is through a parabolic speech that the 'world speaks in voice itself, and voice as well'. This voice 'manages to speak and to be silent simultaneously'" (Altizer 1980, pp. 5–6). Such speaking would emerge through the symbolic nexus that Neumann describes, one that exceeds the symbolic union of opposites as well as their binary oppositions. Speaking the voice of the world articulates the totality of the depths. Speaking with the voice of total presence would convey the expression of what surpasses. It is a form of speech that inspires life in all who feel the resonance of its vibrations.

Sussman (1995) argued that the expression of what surpasses can be generated by *poeisis*. This can be thought of as uniting the potency of one's embodied engagement with living total presence, gathered through *resignation* and *dwelling*, into *logos*. Sussman argued that the enhanced perception found by converging an attention to inner voice and an attunement to the aliveness of the world as capable of endowing metaphor with life, enabled one to relate to the world as if each part was deserving of reverent attention. This felt relatedness provides the thoughtful *experience of what surpasses*. This becomes *poeisis* and open to the *expression of what surpasses* when one decides to imaginatively arrange "one's perceptions, thoughts, and experiences in the medium of words", in obedience to how "the 'living being' within language also calls to be known through relationship" (p. 158). This "living being within language" can be understood as the convergence of the inner voice/*genius* and an awareness of the divine speech in the performance of total presence. Within the Batesons' framework of the third, this performance of inspired speaking becomes the "third" that brings these two pre-existent entities into metaphoric relation.

A mature “living system of speech” (Sussman 1995, pp. 170–71) recognizes how the relationship between the speaker and language, like the speaker and the world, continually fluctuates. This means that true speech eschews a predetermined script: it must “leave the careful crafting of an oral architecture and risk sinking in uncertainty”, an uncertainty that embodies the necessary modality of faith. In a way that seems parallel to Ricoeur’s understanding of dwelling, Sussman argues that those who engage in a living system of speech remain listening at the intersection of “manifest and unmanifest worlds”. Her language narrates how the body of such a speaker would physically bridge two worlds as a third:

The speaker, like language, stands at the intersection of the manifest and unmanifest worlds, whether “unmanifest” refers to the unconscious, the spiritual domain, or just the unknown. If preconceptions, assumptions and the tendency to be judgmental have been sufficiently released, the initiate-speaker stands mostly in “not-knowing”. One can then listen into what wants to be said, for which one must leap toward the unmanifest, and into what can or must be said, for which one must leap toward the manifest, the social context. Both are difficult leaps, but, if accomplished, the speaker allows those two worlds to touch in and through the words. (Sussman 1995, pp. 170–71)

The goal of this attitude toward responsible speaking is a “speech that frees” (p. 175), a speaking that tends to be “plain, rather than fancy, thought-provoking rather than inspiring”, one that intends “to open a space, to dispel the sorcery of ignorance, disease, despair, vengeance, or victimization”, and one that therefore “invites the captives to walk out of such prisons and take a new path. The speech that heals is the speech that frees”. This corresponds, again, to the act of initial naming: the releasing of the unmanifest into an audible, grateful expression.

The liberation involved parallels the description Neumann (2017, p. 269) offers of the symbol of peace, which he argues is etymologically connected to freedom (in German). Like Neumann’s peace, Sussman’s sense of freedom emerges through an equilibrium of opposing forces, rather than a simple absence of constraint. It is a state of being that releases contraries that have been bound together by literalism, awakening them to their full potential. The space of freedom aligns with what Neumann described as “unitary reality”, which allows a reflection on the power of the third. Neumann’s concrete example is the loving connection of mother and infant as “a reality which exists in a Beyond that transcends the dimensions of inner and outer; they live as an image both in the psyche and in the outside world, but apart from all this there is an unknown third component in their midst which is also intended and included in their nature and of which the inner and outer image are no more than different aspects” (pp. 92–93). Framed as maternal care, Neumann believed that *love* “... revealed as the dominant characteristic of this relationship turns out to be the foundation of man’s [*sic*] relationship to the world”. Experiencing love allows humans to “experience the world as an interconnected totality in a context of meaningful interconnectedness” (p. 94).

Ricoeur ended “Religion, Atheism, and Faith” Ricoeur and Ihde (2007) by arguing that moving from the Nietzschean love of fate to a love of creation suggests “a movement from atheism toward faith” because love “is itself compensation”. The essay concludes with Ricoeur applying the experience of compensation as part of what permits the recovery of the image of the father from where it was forsaken as an idol. Identifying the symbol of the father as “a parable of the foundation of love”, Ricoeur posited that “An idol must die so that a symbol of being must begin to speak” (p. 467). Love, rather than vengeance, becomes what allows for the speaking forth of being—and even those idols who anchored hateful and lethal words and actions are not thereby removed from the possibility of redemption. The experience of unitary reality, the speaking forth the voice of the world as the symbol of being, importantly includes within it a love for the totality. The power of this speech, use of metaphor, and presence of love would hopefully speak to a broader conception

of freedom than one limited to property, and could reconstruct metaphors in ways that Jackson indicated would provide a basis for environmental health.

4. Giving God a Name in Love

Having demonstrated the potential for recreating original language by embodying the metaphoric third, one must now examine the process required for naming God. This process begins by demarcating a space for the wholly other than what could be known, even in unitary reality. It then moves to describing both the impossibility of finding the right word to name god, and the urgent demand to do so nonetheless. It is finally realized through becoming physically aware of the embodied capacity required to express the name of God.

4.1. Naming God as a Relational Field

Our contemporary moment confronts us with a language that has been emptied of its silent vitality, evidenced by the nonstop drone of idle chatter, and with a reality that is reduced to its literal appearance. The kinds of speech that parody creative language end up creating judgments that entangle with matter to create fates for humans and the whole of reality through forming articulated assemblages (Weheliye 2014). Because the problem stems from misuse of the naming function of humans, it seems like a potential correction is to invoke or invite the God-word in the performance of theology. The puzzle is how to name God in ways that are not already compromised by the history of literal idolatry, the inappropriate forms of judgmental naming that humans inherit through conventional morality, and through a language that has become exhausted after existing for so long sundered from the world's original place.

It seems possible for humans to experience reality in a total and unitary fashion, and to learn how to engage in grateful and poetic forms of dwelling on earth. Divorced from conventional reality and its narrative trajectories, untethered to literal forms of certainty and their illusions of permanence, such speakers necessarily embrace a mode of faith that springs into and away from each unfolding moment. The result of this is a vertical appreciation of totality through relationships anchored in love. What seems needed is a powerful speaking forth of what David Klemm (1986) calls “enabling language”, words whose presence can call to presence a latent or hidden potential. The task becomes the location of a *different* potential from what literal idolatry has already corrupted. The first step toward a solution is an exploration of what is wholly other than conventional reality and the use of *catathresis* to supply a name. The second step involves sounding, embodying, and then invoking this name through a poetical–political enactment of a freeing field of love, a temporary holding environment.

Such a field would perhaps feel similar to what Robert L. Moore would likely identify, following Eliade, as a sacred space in its ability to hold numinosity, even if and perhaps especially if its latent ability to be charged is not something normally demarcated as such by ritual authorities (Moore and Havlick 2001, pp. 57–67). Such spaces are transformative, invested with qualities consistent with the ritual process. Moore lists three—submission, containment, enactment—that seem consistent with Ricoeur's threefold movement into faith: obedience, consent, dwelling. Those who have moved through this process are equipped to become capable actors within it, and also have the capacity to evoke it. Moore argues that these extraordinary spaces suspend conventional moral thinking, replacing them with a sense of community, equality, and belonging. Moore describes such circumstances as *liminal*: they emerge and disappear. This kind of sacred environment could thus be constructed around any given “expression of what surpasses” and the use of a true naming function.

4.2. Relating to God as Absolute Other

Massive injustices have stemmed from the preferred articulations that have centered around both conventional names for god and the inflation of problematic forms of ratio-

nality as a way to entrench these beliefs. Even if emerging from a time of silence into a period of poetic dwelling is sufficient to lovingly allow a symbol to speak rather than an idol, the habitual modes of entrenched thinking about God make relying on this a risky strategy. Ricoeur notes that the Name maintains a dialectical relationship with idolatry, in part because models that figure the divine have tended to become anthropomorphized (Ricoeur and Pellauer 1995, p. 233). One approach toward an innovative form of narrative theology is grounded in rearticulating how god is named. The onto-theological naming of God has relied on the metaphysics of presence and the corresponding illumination of rationality. A new foundation to faith would thus parallel the path taken to resurrect the capacity for language, turning away from the luminous toward the numinous (Neumann 2017, pp. 36–37), starting with a respect for relational difference rather than idolatrous likeness. This re-orientes the faithful toward a grateful experience of the effective force that surpasses rather than toward the sparks of potential knowledge that eventuate into dead metaphors.

Jerome Miller (1992, pp. 188–98) provides a paradigmatic depiction of a felt relationship to an experience of the wholly other as the presence of Being, which generates a sense of awe that remains “possible only because we can be aware of what is beyond us *as* beyond us” (p. 188). Because it persists in unknowable beyondness, the wholly other is experienced primarily as an intimation, or a potentiality. Its innate nature necessarily resists an ability for cognition to take it as an object. An act of affirmation thus requires faith, not knowledge.

Miller’s depiction of the Absolute Other shows how it provides a model that remains innately distinct from that of idolatry in two ways. First, the Absolute Other cannot be made an idol because it refuses to be made present. Miller (1992, p. 193) writes, “The principle of presence and the absolute Other lie, so to speak, at opposite ends of this entire process, and we ourselves lie between them, stretched between presence as that from which we are disrupted by the throe of inquiry, and the absolute Other as that toward which the throe of inquiry carries us”. Orienting toward the Absolute Other means turning one’s back on the principle of presence, and thus on the ability to construct an idol. Miller reminds readers that the allure of presence is the illusion of invulnerability: “the dream of there being no Other that is not ultimately reducible to the self”.

Secondly, while both an Idol and the Absolute Other generate experiences of awe, the influence of an Idol can always be discerned by the way it demands embodiment. The Idol is able to be sensed and known as an object, is fully present in its splendor and power. It demands worship, commands obeisance, and promises power in exchange for one’s humiliation. The nature of the worship tends to take the form of using the Idol as the ultimate answer. The Absolute Other, on the other hand, invites free choice as to whether or not one remains oriented to its innate unknowability: it offers no reasons and no rewards. The whole experience is completely optional. Following Miller (1992), those who voluntarily open to the awe that results from encountering the Absolute Other experience a humility that feels empowering, reaffirming an inner sense of worth, resulting in worship that is expressed for its own sake. Crucially, this experience of worship is *radically open* to the otherness of every other, sensing the potential intimation of the Absolute Other in every experience. This provides the semantics of differences the Batesons recommended. Worship in this case becomes experiencing life as an open question.

Miller’s Absolute Other remains beyond idolatry: its inaccessibility to presence means that it also remains unable to be named. The term “Absolute Other” is the refusal of a name, because to claim that something is the Absolute Other would be to negate one’s very act of claiming it. An accurate *naming* of God, in Benjamin’s sense of the word, would be fully transformative. To successfully name God in ways that “present” the Absolute Other accomplishes only the simultaneous appearance of that Absolute Otherness in what had been familiar, but also just as simultaneously the disappearance of what one had wanted to point to in the naming, for in being named it no longer is the Absolutely Other that one had intended. Altizer (1990) concretizes this paradox from the Christian perspective: “Both

God and world disappear in the parabolic language of Jesus, or disappear as all that which was once named and evoked as either God or world . . . ” (p. 75).

4.3. The Impossibility of Finding the Right Word

To name something conjures its presence, at least to temporarily configure a relationship with it. To attempt this relative to the Absolute Other, even with correct intentions, would necessarily require an improper use of language. Thus, such an act would, following J. Hillis Miller (1995, p. 40), require *catachresis*. He wrote,

Making equal what is unequal is the basis of figuration. Naming and figuration are the “same”. This means the beginning is *catachresis*, since the initial names are figures brought in from some other semantic region to cover an ignorance, but they do not substitute for any literal words.

Once things are taken into language, the word (sound or image) is treated as *equal* to what it represents. Having a name would not necessarily make the Absolute Other less other than what it is. That said, even the repetition of the term “Absolute Other” (as you read it here) tends to make it seem smaller than that which compels awe, humility, and worship—it becomes more like a name than a description, especially because experiences of it, properly speaking, are never complete (even if no experience of any thing would be “complete”). Because the Absolute Other intimates only its radical difference, any name would be a *catachresis* “..the violent, forced, or abusive importation of a term from another realm to name something which has no proper name” (Miller 1995, p. 21)—at least relative to a conventional use of language.

At the same time, it is possible to imagine the original language defined by Benjamin as being something other than this. The naming that Benjamin described, or even Sussman’s belief that “the speech that heals is the speech that frees” (Sussman 1995, pp. 174–75), seems to indicate a different potentiality of language. Rather than something violent, perhaps such a healing or freeing language—even as *catachresis*—would be demonstrated by what Meido Moore calls a “turning word” in Zen, “speech that suddenly causes the student to turn around the light of awareness and recognize the intrinsic wisdom that has never been absent” (Moore 2020, p. 31). While this event could be jarring or disruptive, disruption, and especially disruption even at an embodied level, is crucial for being both freed and healed. Again, from Moore (2020, p. 117):

we could never arrive at acceptable answers to our pressing existential questions through intellectual analysis and learned knowledge alone. Nothing that we could read, think, contemplate, or conceive will lead by itself to a truly satisfying resolution. Only answers that explode forth from the deepest totality of one’s integrated being can satisfy and liberate.

Invoking the Absolute Other through a word would involve a devastating, totalizing, and ultimately integrating form of liberation. It would be a *numinous* experience, involving one’s whole self, rather than merely a *luminous* experience that would speak solely to consciousness.

Jackson and Kelley indicated the hopeful capacity for art to open audiences to transformative numinous experiences, and the Batesons indicated that art, like religion, provided important opportunities to become so enriched. It would also appear that wholly secular texts would have the capacity to name god by invoking a fully numinous experience in an audience. J. Hillis Miller (1991, pp. 139–50) argued that both sacred and secular parables (such as those Kafka wrote) are *catachreses*. He distinguishes sacred from secular based on whether the parable is spoken by someone who “has that knowledge to start with . . . who *is* that knowledge, by someone who is the Logos itself in all the sense of that word: mind, reason, knowledge, speech, measure, ratio, ground of all things”. Because he concludes by underlining the extreme difficulty of completely distinguishing the secular and sacred, he invites consideration of the human potentiality to utter a performative word that makes

something happen in the minds and hearts of the hearers. At the same time, Miller (1991) added,

but this happening is a knowledge of a state of affairs already existing, the kingdom of heaven and the way to get there ... [that] brings something into existence that has no basis except in the words ... even when some aspect of the contexts is amiss ... (p. 139).

Altizer (1980) would fully agree. He wrote: “a fully parabolic language gives no sign of either a source or a purpose lying outside of itself. Perhaps we could say that the intention of parable is to realize an enactment of speech wherein a totality of speakable or realizable identity is wholly present and immediately at hand” (p. 3). Its immersive nature would explain why Miller (1991) held that even “the one who invents the parable could not say whether the catachresis summoned figures from something that “pre-exists the language” (p. 148). Put otherwise, a true name for god creates the universe in which this god has always been operative.

Nonetheless, when it comes to potentially naming god, however, art and religion have different functions. For Ricoeur, because both poetic and religious texts can create worlds that readers find ways to imaginatively inhabit by deploying their most unique capabilities there, what separates out the latter is solely the intent to name God (Ricoeur and Pellauer 1995, p. 232). Understanding “God” as a referent, for Ricoeur, “... is not just the index of the mutual belonging together (*appartenance*) of the originary forms of the discourse of faith. It is also the index of their incompleteness. It is their common goal, which escapes each of them” (p. 228). Ricoeur looks at the form of the parable as exemplary because “it combines a narrative structure, a metaphorical process, and a limit-expression” and thus illustrates simultaneously how God is like and unlike what was just depicted. Unlike “Absolute Other”, which problematically becomes equivalent to a proper name, a parabolic name retains a resistance to literal experience or expression.

Parabolic speech thus introjects a different kind of language situation into a context. This enables a religious word to become appropriate. As Ebeling wrote, “Most words are uttered in a sentence as unit of meaning that supplies it with context divorced from the context of the surrounding world, including the speaker and the hearer” (Ebeling 1986, p. 205). As Benjamin found, this most often occurs in a problematic way relative to the judgmental language that parodies the creative word of God. Most speech creates unloving environments that damage the health of those around. This includes expressions of literal idolatry through social media, which keeps users sundered from an awareness of the suffering such language perpetuates in the world. However, parabolic speech is unique by interrupting this otherwise occurring context. It gathers and liberates a vital community of all those who are present, the living being of language itself that wishes to be heard, a reality that wishes to become present, and perhaps “God”.

The parable avoids the potential violence of catachresis by presenting ordinary reality in ordinary language. Parables are “wholly enacted in the actuality of a present moment of time, and are enacted in common and worldly events, and even enacted in a common or vernacular language which is the language of everybody or everyone” (Altizer 1990, p. 71). Despite this commonality, they nonetheless simultaneously provide access to a deep appreciation of the potentiality of the moment that had been hidden. The language augments into actuality what had hitherto only been a virtual reality. This presentation of a virtual reality is a freeing activation of this potential into the awareness of the speaker and listener, liberating all present to participate in this event. This liberation, conducted and transmitted by the speaking forth of the parable, is thus a momentary liberation of the human and more-than-human world into an experience of reality that was otherwise both unknown and unknowable.

4.4. The Possibility of Naming “God”

David Klemm (1986, pp. 193–94) argued that the contemporary potency of the term “God” survives its misuse: even a mistaken attempt to relate to a metaphysical being entails

a more originary form of openness to language, marked by “God”. Rather than a divine entity, Klemm uses the term “God” to summon the nonfigurable, nonliteralizable event of reflective linguistic awareness. He wrote that the term God “evokes and manifests essential human openness as openness through word”, which “... means the basic human situation as one in which we are given a language, called upon to speak, and made answerable to the situation in which we find ourselves”. This foundation, even when not spoken or named as such, provides the vital connection to what Klemm describes as *enabling words*, which also “uncover elements of our basic human existence”. Klemm suggests that such terms “call forth or enable the realities they describe—words like *freedom, future, and truth*”. This perhaps would indicate that when contextually anchored within this quality of awareness of “God” (whether or not this particular vocable is used), such enabling words liberate the human and more-than-human community of listeners toward an expanded and potentially nonfallen experience of reality.

It is worth slowing down to think carefully about the influence that words have in generating important human experiences of liberatory realization. In a seeming echo of Benjamin, Gerhard Ebeling argued that “word mediates understanding ... by announcing in a familiar context something that is hidden”. The familiar context is the “field of experience into which a word is spoken”, and word announces openly and publicly that which was latent as extraneous knowledge prior to its linguistic expression (Klemm 1986, p. 219). Understanding is thus an event in which the speaking of language augments in consciousness that which had been within the field of experience. As the word emerges and presents what was hidden, the effect necessarily and totally remakes the field.

This moment of liberation is not merely the addition of a sound, nor sound and concept, nor the combination of sound, concept, and referent. It reconfigures the foundation of the experiential field and foregrounds not only that which was hidden but the realm of what had, moments before, been extraneous knowledge, a virtual reality. The introduction of this new dimension to experience thus provides a new total way of relating to all others within the field, just as the introduction of a third dimension adds a new way of painting and interacting with paintings. The radically transformative potential of such moments reflects the power of enabling words—one could add the world *imagine* to Klemm’s list of *freedom, future, and truth* as terms harnessed to the God axis of the human position within language. The ability to speak forth liberation arises because one is open to the totality of this situation, and witnessing someone proclaiming these terms creates a new openness.

Enabling words are effective only to the extent that they are fully stated. Thus, the key to naming God (no matter what vocable or parable is used) in a manner that activates the experiential field so as to liberate those present is through a total participation in its virtual reality. This distinguishes a transformation of experience from more general announcements of a possible reality. The former mode of speaking, according to Scharlemann (1981, p. 100), “provides the donation of reality that corresponds to a projection of reality made through other assertions: the realities that are otherwise only existential possibilities appear as real in the announcing person”. Scharlemann continues, writing that the assertion “God is love” is true if, in a person who is announcing “God is love” to us, the love of God is really presented. “God is love” is true because the announcement to us by another is actually heard as the reality of love on the part of the one who, though not the same as the announcing person, is speaking at the same time.

To name “God” as “love”, or as the human openness to word, requires that the one naming God wholly embodies that which is named at the time of the naming. As mentioned above, this form of donative communication occurs when one embodies three forms of language simultaneously through one’s enhanced sensitivity: the language of things, human speech, and the living being of language. Donative communication allows the effective coordination of naming, so that a word becomes united with “persons, things, and events” molded through a poetic rendering of “perceptions, thoughts, and experiences” (Sussman 1995, p. 158). One’s overall word choices create a context in which the God axis can be identified—making it a “religious” rather than simply “poetic” moment. The

contextual statement one makes determines the way in which one's words are heard. This peculiar form of enactment requires forms of embodied speech. Speaking through one's body allows words to matter, giving them a weight, shape, and substance that has transformational value.

The first step in this mode of embodied speaking comes through allowing the body to resonate with the sound of the word. Meido Moore (2020) discusses how the importance of chanting in Zen is to alter one's embodied relationship to sound. The purpose is "to cause one's own body cavities to resonate" (p. 211) and create "experiential change within the body-mind of both chanter and listener" as "an effect of mantric sound itself, not the conceptual meaning of the text we are chanting" (p. 251). Because it "creates sound, it usefully provides immediate feedback to us regarding . . . the degree to which we are able to bodily vibrate with that sound", including "depth, resonance, and penetrating quality" (p. 211). With practice, one "will start to feel that the body . . . resonates with the sound all together and that the sound is actually being projected downward, through the body and even into the earth, rather than upward and out from your mouth" (p. 213). Relative to the ability for this sound to substantially alter the field of experience, Moore's remarks on the "one letter sutra" are important: "the essential point of those sutras can be arrived at experientially through reciting the mantra alone, or even through reciting the sound of a single syllable" (p. 253). Further, Moore holds that the mantric qualities of the *Shosaishu*, "activated by our way of practicing that engages the whole psycho-physical being and causes us to vibrate" open the door to the energetic field created by the totality of those who have "extended their own bodies and minds into those same patterns of mantric sound" (p. 254).

The second step of enacting this form of embodied speaking comes through understanding how the meaning of the sound can be somatically experienced and expressed. Stephen Wangh (2000, pp. 150–52) described how infant voices and bodies are united with initial sounds, cries, laughter, and emotions. Learning language is achieved through the eyes and body: "Nouns are pointed to, touched, and tasted. And verbs are lived" such that the term "sit" involves the act of sitting, the word "no" is stated with clenched fists and stomping feet, and joy goes beyond saying yes to literally clapping the hands and jumping with legs". Gradually, language is "no longer an extension of bodily expression but a substitute for it. We learn that when we need to pee, we should not hold our crotch . . . " and we learn to use words such as "thank you" as a substitute for jumping, and then as a substitute for the reality of joy. Ultimately, "words become utterly detached from their original, visceral connections" so that "before we can demand open, expressive language from our voices, we must first exhume the ancient connection we have spent so many years diligently burying within ourselves". Wangh also notes that, in America, disconnecting body, voice, and emotion not only occurs by discouraging physical activity while speaking, but it literally denies depth, causing us to "emphasize words by changing volume and tempo, not by raising or lowering vocal pitch". Wangh's expertise in teaching actors how to reconnect with full expression reveals both our original access to embodied speech and our capacity to recover it.

Jennifer Nash argued "black feminism's long practice of love-politics centers on two key ideas: vulnerability and witnessing" (Nash 2019, pp. 114–17). She understands vulnerability in terms of "intimate proximity" through nearing the bodies of others, but positions the consequences of this beyond mere susceptibility to injury. Appealing to Judith Butler, Nash wrote that vulnerability comes from a more comprehensive "being undone", which "can take the form of grief and mourning, desire and ecstasy, solidarity and empathy, and mutual regard". Her strong definition of vulnerability thus becomes "the decision to embrace rather than retreat from the possibility of our potential undoing". This vulnerability engenders an appreciation for conceiving love as a "unifying political principle" that asks about the "deep responsibilities" and enduring connections" that we have as coinhabitants of a social world.

Her understanding of witnessing is also important. Consistent with the work of Klemm and Scharlemann, Nash (2019, p. 119) described how an effective work of witnessing is capable of opening up a virtual reality that becomes realized in its effective communication. She wrote, “Black women are, then, witnesses who can see and even name forms of violence that other subjects cannot see, or simply refuse to see”, inasmuch as black women’s historical grounding is as “subjects who witness what is meant to be kept invisible, unnamed, unseen”. Black women thus demonstrate the capacity to bear witness through an act of total presence, presenting an act of naming that foregrounds dimensions of a reality otherwise ignored. Nash then connected this work of embodied witnessing to love:

This willingness to name, to make visible, to again and again describe and analyze structures of domination is a laborious act for black women, one that can be emotionally and politically taxing. Yet this act of witnessing, for self and for others, for naming what others seek to ignore or normalize is, black feminists assert, a practice of love, of tenderness, and of political world-making.

The ability to speak (as a third) for “self and others”, to illuminate what others nearby have been socialized to ignore as extraneous knowledge, is an act of love to all present. It communicates love both to those who are victims of articulated assemblages and also to those bystanders who would otherwise be oblivious. Vulnerable to the event of the moment and able to bear witness in a fully embodied way, Nash posited a way that “God” can be situationally enacted.

5. Freedom in the Name of Love

Neumann spoke of love as a primal experience of a unitary reality, that which connected, contained, and surpassed mother and infant. The Batesons spoke of love as a “three way metaphor”, including self, other, and self plus other. The potential of love to provide a way to navigate beyond the language of self and other is important, especially when related to an embodied revelation that names “god”.

Jessica Benjamin’s standout *Beyond Doer and Done to* (Benjamin 2017, pp. 22–30) emerges from the field of psychoanalysis to provide clear guidance on the capacity of speech to invoke an empowering, transformative relational field through the figure of the Third. She invokes the Third as a way to contextualize the quality of interactional dynamics that occur between a speaker and listener. It involves vulnerability: “thirdness is the intersubjective mental space that facilitates or results from surrender” to “some principle or process that mediates between self and other”. Such submission involves a capacity to become a responsible participant within a relational context. Although Benjamin recognized Lacan’s influence in suggesting how thirdness is invoked through the capacity for language to allow both similarity and difference, she importantly distinguished the linguistic basis of thirdness as belonging to the maternal, avoiding the Freudian model of prohibition. The basis for communication and thus recognition, as Benjamin defined it, is *felt* rather than *heard*: it “begins with the early nonverbal experience of sharing a pattern, a dance, with another person”. This follows both Ricoeur and Walter Benjamin and thus provides a suitable framework to conclude the essay.

The felt basis of communication opens up a method of communication that expands beyond the literal to incorporate paradox and play, which sometimes uses gesture and tone to designate a world of meaning that exceeds the literal capacity of verbal speech (Benjamin 2017, p. 36). Benjamin follows Gregory Bateson’s work on metacognition to suggest that “non-verbal, proto-symbolic communication” (p. 148) is important because it is designated as a significant and differently meaningful kind of verbal exchange. This allows situations of enactment, a term that Benjamin uses to include but also go beyond traditional psychodynamic use, as potentiating (p. 143).

Problematically, the harmonious and playful understanding of nuance is not always a given. Benjamin (2017, pp. 154–55) uses the term “decoupled state” to describe when implicit (felt) and symbolic (verbal) forms of communication are sundered from presymbolic

experiences with thirdness. She theorizes that decoupling is present within the mutually contradicting set of expectations involved in a double bind: this space uses paradox to paralyze through threats of punishment, unlike inviting play through the promise of pleasure. The decoupled state is equivalent to literal idolatry, as separating the implicit and symbolic “evolves into a detached or dissociated form of observation . . . the split off intellectual functioning that cannot hold paradox”. This results in a failure to relate the felt and verbal levels of communication. Such a breakdown in communication is contagious, spilling from the patient to the therapist, and eventually infects the “shared rhythm”. This decoupled state, attended by dissociation and disconnection, is not only seemingly a desired outcome of conventional morality (which often involves “do as I say, not as I do”), but would seem foundational to the otherwise inexplicable disdain for personal health evidenced during the pandemic.

This dissociative stance is learned. Benjamin (2017), discussing Rousseau’s critique of Enlightenment rationality, argued that there’s an “involuntary, unbidden identification that may justifiably be seen as a first, untutored response of our nature”. The absence of this, our contemporary world filled with “self-interested individual[s] that [deny] social connectedness”, emerges from “developing dissociative processes” to better protect “when need-satisfying dependency is unsafe . . . facilitated by certain forms of intellectual activity” (p. 229). Tragically, it seems as though the decoupled state is largely the reality that most people in contemporary society inhabit.

The best cure for decoupling is *recoupling*, in which a therapist provides an experience of becoming reattuned to an integrated, harmonious state. Benjamin (2017, p. 155) describes this as when an “emergent shared affect, metaphor or meaning is then experienced as a shared Third”, through an intersubjective process that allows a patient to experience the coherence of feeling and sound. Rather than focus on the literal content of what words are spoken, Benjamin finds that the true content at stake remains in the “unthought known”, an analogue of Neumann’s “extraneous knowledge”. Recoupling allows the recreation of paradox, where two different levels of meaning inspire awareness of a complex, no longer merely literal, appreciation of truth. Often, in the context of therapy, it is important that such experiential knowledge remains enacted, not literal—a form of fantasy.

The space of fantasy invoked here differs from the dissociated refusal of reality that emerges from a decoupled state; instead, it provides a liberating state of immersion and play. Benjamin’s description parallels the discussion of sacred space offered by Robert Moore (Moore and Havlick 2001) above:

one version of surrender to the Third—giving over to a co-created structure that transcends and absorbs the individuals so that they attain a freedom from self-consciousness, effort, or strain. Such release into play implies feeling at ease in the paradoxical space of analysis as real/not real, because the boundary is clear and secures the space.

(Benjamin 2017, p. 170)

Within the world of therapy, an attuning and embodied other provides the experience of wholeness, recognition, and acceptance. “This someone should be knowing of the dangerous world of death yet also connected to the world of life and loving” (Benjamin 2017, p. 204). Effective healing requires that “some other power be dramatically embodied that would represent safe attachment and lawfulness, including the possibility of repair. Surrender would need some manifestation of the moral Third, a lawful world” (p. 206).

Although Benjamin is writing from the perspective of therapy, and largely to a presumed audience of those familiar with relational psychodynamics, the qualifications for providing a “recoupling” experience through the use of paradox and play are largely those which have already been listed: bearing witness to a virtual reality which, in its named presentation, becomes liberated and liberating. Such experiences are transformative for those in decoupled states—those born into a world of literal idolatry, for example—insofar as it liberates their potentiality through an instant of what a Zen master might call “direct pointing”. Those who have undergone the process of resurrecting the dead metaphor, those

who were born into bodies made to witness the invisible—such people in bearing witness to a whole reality and “naming god” through a paradoxical speech act serve as a bridge for those inhabiting a decoupled reality, liberating them through, and enabling them to, love.

The moral Third appears throughout Benjamin’s book as a point of interconnection. It has little to do with conventional morality and its divisions into good and evil based on literal, abstracted commandments and prohibitions. What Benjamin (2017) offers, instead, is a vision of morality that is participatory rather than “objective”, accepting shared responsibility for moments of breakdown as a way to gain shared access to resolving it (p. 46). For Benjamin, the moral Third provides access to tools that allow humans to simply accept What Is (p. 161) rather than using judgmental language to decouple through the incorrect use of the naming power. Those who refuse to scorn “weakness and vulnerability” (p. 226) but responsibly embody it can “overcome the splitting into discarded and dignified” and thus allow others an option of “primal identification” with what is conventionally rejected, allowing an alternative to what is right and wrong. Such a figure can “dignify suffering”.

Such a figure, with love, might effectively name god.

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