

The Neutral, Inhuman and the Intimate

From Dark Intelligibility

Porosity and the Neutral

“The World had always been humanized. Now I was before the inhuman. The neutral was what was intimate.”¹ Clarice Lispector’s narrator in *The Passion According to G.H.* encounters an intimacy that is not warm, not consoling, but alien. Intimacy here is not the communion of similarity, but the piercing proximity of otherness. There is an otherness to selving. The cockroach, that abject creature, tears through the membrane of her constructed self. She confronts what she calls “the great living neutrality struggling”,² life stripped of its human face, vitality indifferent to meaning.

William Desmond offers a striking parallel in his book *the God and the Between*: “The idiocy of being is the sheer astonishment that there is anything at all, its intimate givenness and its foreign neutrality.”³ What Lispector calls the neutral, Desmond refers to as the primal ethos: the bare fact of being before any determination, given to us before we come to be in a double register — as strangely intimate and irreducibly foreign.

Both writers refuse the hard split of subject and object. For Lispector, the self is undone by what leaks through from within and without. For Desmond, the self always arises at the *metaxu*, the between, the self and other always constantly co-determining. The key point is not merely that the world resists humanization, but that the self too harbors alterity. To be porous to the other is to be porous to oneself. Selving is not a closed autonomy but an openness where alterity can shine through.

When the constructions of self break down, something else emerges — the fertile neutrality of being. What is neutral is

not dead; it is generative precisely in its refusal to conform to categories. This fertility is terrifying because it loosens the boundaries of identity. Yet it is also the beginning of intimacy — a strange intimacy with the inhuman in ourselves.

The Saltless Truth and the Pharmakon

Lispector locates the ordeal with a striking metaphor: “For salt I had always been ready, salt was the transcendence that I used to experience a taste, and to flee what I was calling ‘nothing.’ But what my mouth wouldn’t know how to understand—was the saltless.”⁴ The salt becomes our filters and constructions, our limited self-determination which ultimately forecloses our direct encounter with being’s naked actuality.

Desmond frames the same ordeal as the tension between *conatus essendi* and *passio essendi*: “We are given to be before we give ourselves to be. There is a *passio essendi*, a patience of being, more primordial than our *conatus essendi*, our endeavor to be.”⁵ *Conatus* is our striving, our effort to preserve and assert selfhood, keeping reality in a digestible order. *Passio* is our given-ness, the raw unmediated encounter of being.

Being at this level can be seen as a *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* reaches us through a philosophical lineage that reveals its metaxological character. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, King Thamus warns that writing—Thoth’s gift to humanity—will be both remedy and poison for memory: strengthening external recall while weakening the soul’s internal capacity for recollection. Bernard Stiegler extends this insight in his technopharmacology, showing how technical objects are constitutive of human becoming itself—we co-evolve with our tools in what is fundamentally a metaxological relationship. Technology is neither external instrument nor internal capacity but the very between-space where human and world co-determine each other.

The **Pharmakon of Being** I’m proposing operates at this same constitutive level, but more fundamentally still. Where Derrida’s *pharmakon* reveals the undecidability of conceptual oppositions, and Stiegler’s technopharmacology shows the co-constitutive relationship between human and technical objects, the **Pharmakon of Being** concerns our metabolic encounter

with existence itself. This concerns the ordeal of existence: whether we can bear being's gift without being destroyed by its excess.

Desmond hints at this metabolic dimension: "We clot on ourselves again and close the porosity. The blood stream of life is made the carrier of death."⁶ The same encounter with being's overdeterminate richness can either open us to deeper community or close us off into "counterfeit doubles" of authentic transcendence.

Lispector embodies this viscerally. The roach's white matter becomes literal *pharmakon*—she must eat it to receive its truth, knowing it may poison her old self even as it nourishes new understanding. The "anti-sin" she discovers is precisely this willingness to metabolize reality rather than flee into transcendent abstractions. This is the metaxological courage to remain in the between rather than escape to false unities.

The ambiguity is fundamental. There is only so much indeterminate grace we can bear. Can we come to terms with our own strangeness? As the self protests, calcified by its own understanding, can we let the world collapse and come to trembling uncertainty? It will certainly require courage.

The Violence of Grace

"I prefer to call it disorganization because I don't want to ground myself in what I experienced—in that grounding I would lose the world as it was for me before, and I know I don't have the capacity for another one."⁷

Grace is not orderly illumination but a tearing apart of structures. After collapse we live among ruins: the ruins of our meaning, the ruins of our selves. We would like to return to the familiar middle, to salt and season what we once knew. But could we fool ourselves? The collapse cannot be undone.

The violence of grace occurs when we encounter what exceeds us, placing us in the strata between finite and infinite where our constructs are shattered. In Lispector's *G.H.*, the brutality of grace is unflinching: the protagonist is violently unseated by an encounter that kills her narcissistic certainties even as it births strange compassion. There is no gentle

pedagogy — grace strikes like a knife. The violence is felt because grace collapses the ‘familiar middle,’ the counterfeit refuge built by conatus, and forces us back into astonishment

And yet something in us consents. There is a blurring of heteronomy and autonomy: ordeal comes from outside, yet it is also our own doing. We say yes to being transformed, even as this yes undoes us. As Desmond notes, the new astonishment is a gratitude “won from suffering; a ‘yes’ purged of complaint; an affirmation that has wept, as there is a mourning that is blessed.”⁸

This is what Lispector calls “the worse truth”⁹ — horrible because it confronts the totality: the yes and the no, the beautiful and the horrific, the gift and the ordeal together. It is the pharmakon of being: a medicine that heals us by poisoning us, an excess that disorganizes us to reorient us.

The paradox is stark. Ordeal comes as heteronomy, as Rilke’s command “*You must change your life.*”¹⁰ But it also demands our autonomy, our willingness to undergo. It is a participatory surrender, a choice that is also not a choice. For what if we refuse? The pharmakon of being cannot be avoided; it can only be received, consciously or unconsciously. The question is whether we can metabolize reality, or whether we are metabolized by our refusal.

Toward Dark Intelligibility

To affirm suchness without narrative, to receive the pharmakon without fleeing—this is the intimacy with the inhuman, the fertile neutrality at the heart of being. It is here, in the ruins, that astonishment begins again.

This metabolic relationship points toward what I call **dark intelligibility**—understanding that emerges not despite our encounter with the incomprehensible, but precisely through it. Both Desmond and Lispector chart pathways toward knowing that embrace rather than eliminate mystery. Dark intelligibility is not the end of reason but its maturation, when knowing learns to dwell companionably with what exceeds it.

If the neutral reveals inhuman intimacy at the heart of being, and the pharmakon shows us the ordeal of receiving being’s

ambiguous gift, then dark intelligibility names the method by which we learn to read reality's hyperbolic excess through disciplined attention to what resists comprehension.

This is not anti-rational thinking but hyperrational—reason stretched to its creative limits, discovering that its deepest success lies not in mastery but in responsive finesse. Lispector's final words capture this: "I am not understanding whatever it is I'm saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say... And so I adore it."¹¹

The adoration that emerges from not-understanding signals intelligence that has learned to think at the edge of thought itself. The saltless truth demands nothing less than transformation of intelligence—from grasping to receiving, from solving to dissolving, from the light that illuminates objects to the darkness that lets being show itself as inexhaustible mystery.

Notes

1. Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey (New York: New Directions, 2012), [PAGE NEEDED].
2. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].
3. William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 331.
4. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].
5. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 21.
6. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.
7. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].
8. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 121.
9. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].
10. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* [CITATION NEEDED].
11. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 189.