

# Dark Intelligibility

The Pharmakon of Being

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# Companionability and Possession

“I really like things I don’t understand. When I read a thing I don’t understand, I feel a sweet and abysmal vertigo.”—

*Clarice Lispector, A Breath of Life, p. 29*

I should disorganize, and yet structure simultaneously. I should create meta-structures that can kiss disorganization here and there.

I love the pen. I’m too disconnected from the physical process of writing. There is a different flow when you actually draw the words.

What has language done for me, for better and worse? Or perhaps more precisely: How does the determined become companionable to indeterminacy? How do light and dark conjoin in *chiaroscuro*? And how to develop the metabolic capacity to receive the *chiaroscuro*, to affirm their interpenetration? This requires more than intellectual

understanding; it demands a transformation of our very relation to being.

Today, in a world where ambiguity dominates and social cohesion evaporates, too much meaning exists—univocal, equivocal, or otherwise. What draws our focus is the ever-present stage of self-determination, the human spectacle. We can see that there are real limits to that self-determination. Being is communicative, but it is inseparable from non-being. I seem to be spinning around dualities again. There is an urgency for us to become intimate to their conjunctions and interpenetrations. However, the demands of life hijack our capacity to open to them. Let us stop making sense for a moment and try to delve deeper.

I have to confess I cannot be honest to you, dear reader. I'm not sure I have the capacity to speak truth to myself, truth to power, or anything. I'm in love yes, and I will follow that flame. But I don't know what I can contribute.

Maybe this essay will be some half-unfinished regurgitation, un-metabolized material, purged from a system that is processing, messy, academically questionable, of questionable authenticity. On the page I should not shy from truth as I do not do so in my body, my soul. I encounter myself fully. But of course I'm full of my own bullshit too.

Writing itself becomes a site of perplexity and astonishment. Perhaps in an attempt give myself breath, to give myself space to wonder and attend to myself. Not as achievement but as necessity, an attempt to save my life. I want to connect even more deeply to the world for as long as I will have energy to do so.

Words do not come easy at times, so we let them be. It is natural not to know the way, so we should become lost. If there is one thing clear I can say about myself, it is that I'm lost. I find things, things happen to me, but I am groundless, like a cell breaking open, its contents spilling out. Disorganization can be messy.

And yet there remains the bare fact that I am here at all. That anything is at all. Before we become, we are first given to be. This remains our *original astonishment*: we are thrown into the midst of the sheer that-it-is of being.

How can I write without knowing where to go? I shall have somebody else write through me. Starting with my parental voices, Clarice Lispector and William Desmond.

Heteronomy is the intrusion autonomy tries to prevent. We encounter the other, framed as an intrusion. If it's not capable of being dominated, at least made manageable. We foreclose true encounter with the other, but the relations remain and with it the potential for another break.

The other intrudes in myself as well. In my voice, my very being, there is a whole host of voices speaking through me.

Even writing can surprise us as the words appear on the page as if coming from a foreign source. The text appears as if coming from beyond me.

It is certainly astonishing that we, such porous interconnected beings, think of ourselves as autonomous. In ourselves there seems a dispersal of agency, focused on the other. At any given moment I am possessed by voices not my own, and yet somehow I still say "I."

My body feels like I should inhabit the writing as practice, poetry and philosophy. I will write fragments, like I write here. I feel easily possessed. This doesn't have to be a problem. Maybe the horde of voices coalesces in a full and emptied coherence, until something singular appears. Not out of erotic desire but love, of deepest intimacy and companionship.

I will write as a lover who falls in love at first sight and is completely pre-occupied with her beloved. But I'm also searching, searching for a resonance in the tuning fork of being.

*Cum panis* indeed. Following Desmond's sense of the open whole, do we arrive at a liberated autonomy? An autonomy that knows itself to be plurivocal and connected to others? Perhaps such freedom emerges by transformation of our relation to the other—to undergo the ordeal of being claimed by what exceeds us, until the intrusion reveals itself as gift. Can we come companionable to what threatens to possess and destroy us?

To return briefly to the chiaroscuro: a beautiful word, for I used to draw too, and writing is an extension of drawing. The mediaticity of writing physically is its own medium. I have drawn on tablets and made beautiful life drawings but they remain digital files.

If we consider writing the techno-pharmakon par excellence then of course we cannot underestimate the power of a trembling hand furtively scribbling thoughts to the page as if the line was its very consciousness.

Sweet and abysmal because, hell, we have no idea and we still want to sit with the question. Companionable to the question.

Breath, dissolution, structure, should be part of writing. Words should be able to breathe. We can run into blockages and aporia and what do we do? Give up? Hunt further?

Or let it breathe?

Aporia is companionable to the going, sweetly abysmal as it is. What appears as dead-end becomes, for the patient, the site where new passages open.

My desire for possession comes not from a desire for self-dissolution but for recognizing interdependence and flowing in the river. What freedom would that give? It could be radical.

The body writes and has written for a few thousand years, enough for it to be a new page in our evolutionary techgnosis. Quickly it is being abandoned for the keyboard and the screen. Command line interfaces.

While there are ways of exaptation and we are of course fluid beings in becoming, I do still like physical writing. Perhaps precisely because it is a form of drawing.

Today it felt urgent to work but it also felt urgent to disorganize.

I was playful in letting Lispector and Desmond together with me make us into a triangle. Geometric stability through threeness, yet each point remains irreducible. Not synthesis but constellation.

Both Desmond and Clarice are enactive of what they write about. It is a lived philosophy after all. Porosity requires that intimacy, that vulnerability of expression in the midst of things. I want to get to the



threshold of both thinkers. The aim here is not a perfect synthesis, which would risk domesticating the radical singularity of each voice. Rather, it is to stage a tense and improvisational tango where resonance emerges from the space opened up between them. Hopefully I will not be a wallflower.

I am a sponge—I allow plurivocity to color me. The concepts presented here are hard-won, brought forth not from a place of mastery but through sustained perplexity and help from others.

The body writes. There is a restlessness there. This disorganization felt urgent, and it worked. But the danger is tying disorganization and productivity to any external means, lest we become too dependent. We are not independent—we allow heteronomy to affect our writing as well.

However, this disorganization and productivity is dangerous to be tied to any single source. Since I am not independent, I flow with the interdependence. But I must remain vigilant.

Other voices can feel prosthetic. It feels somehow shameful. I feel like I'm not trying to actually undergo true vulnerability. Thinking about things often helps us avoid actually dealing with life. I'm too scared to be genuinely authentic. Take this text with a grain of salt. I should stop trying to be intelligible and practice what I preach. I don't have to make myself intelligible. Lispector refuses. I can have my secrets too.

# The Pharmakon and the Metaxu

## Porosity and the Neutral

Clarice Lispector's narrator in *The Passion According to G.H.* encounters an alien intimacy. She confronts what she calls "the great living neutrality struggling",<sup>1</sup> life stripped of its human face, vitality indifferent to meaning. Intimacy here is not the communion of similarity, but the piercing proximity of otherness. There is an otherness to selving.

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."<sup>2</sup> 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, where self and other constantly co-determine each other. But what exactly is this “between”?

## The Metaxu as Overdetermined Between

Desmond’s concept of the *metaxu* (μεταξύ)—the “between”—provides the ontological framework for understanding how Lispector and Desmond navigate the space where intelligible and unintelligible, self and other, human and inhuman meet without reduction. We are constituted *in* relation, through the between- the “rich ontological intermedium of happening”<sup>3</sup> where beings and their others constantly co-determine each other. As the intermedium of happening it is an “overdetermined” space, saturated with excessive possibility. The *metaxu* is where different modes of being encounter each other in their genuine otherness while remaining in relation. It is the field of relation itself.

The *metaxu* operates through what Desmond calls *double mediation*: both self-mediation (consciousness thinking itself through its other) and *intermediation* (the other’s genuine mediation from its own otherness). This is crucial. In self-mediation, the self relates to itself by passing through what appears as other—this is the familiar movement of reflection, where I come to know myself by encoun-

tering what I am not. But intermediation names something more radical: the other genuinely mediates from its own center, its own idiotic singularity, and is not reducible to my self-relation.

Unlike dialectical thinking, which ultimately collapses otherness back into self-relation (the other becomes a moment in the self's own becoming), *metaxological* thinking maintains genuine plurality within unity. The other remains other even in the intimacy of encounter. The cockroach does not become a symbol that G.H. masters; it retains its “thick radiant indifference,” its alien vitality that cannot be assimilated.

This double mediation is precisely what Lispector enacts in her literary practice. The protagonist's encounter with the cockroach creates a *metaxu*—a space where human and non-human, subject and object, familiar and strange meet without reduction to dialectical unity. G.H. cannot synthesize the roach into her understanding; she can only undergo the ordeal of remaining in the between, letting it work on her, dissolving the protective boundaries she has constructed.

## Surplus Givenness and the Overdeterminate

Both thinkers understand this “between” as *overdetermined* rather than indeterminate. For Desmond, being presents itself as *surplus givenness*—an excessive abundance that gives rise to astonishment rather than mastery. Being gives more than we can ask for, more than our concepts can contain, more than our self-determination can manage. This surplus is not a problem to be solved but the primal

condition of existence itself.

For Lispector, reality exceeds linguistic capture not through poverty but through richness: “reality is too delicate, only reality is delicate, my unreality and my imagination are heavier.”<sup>4</sup> Her prose constantly gestures toward what language cannot hold—not because reality is void, but because it overflows every attempt at containment. The neutral is not empty but fertile—generative precisely in its refusal to conform to our categories.

This overdetermination means that the *metaxu* is always already more than any single perspective can encompass. The self cannot master the between because the between exceeds the self’s totalizing grasp. Yet this excess is not a limitation but a gift—it is what allows genuine encounter, genuine surprise, genuine transformation. We are claimed by more than we can claim.

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. The *metaxu* names this condition: we are always already in relation, always already situated in a between that precedes and exceeds our self-determination.

It proceeds that the illusion of a bounded, autonomous self as a refuge, a protective enclosure we build to manage the overwhelming porosity of our given condition. This autonomy functions as a shell, defending us from the heteronomy threatening to dissolve our boundaries. The opening from the isolated self fiction to the alterity of selving reveals that what we experience as intrusion is already intimate to our being. The very structure of the *metaxu* means we are porous not only to external others but to the otherness within

ourselves—to what exceeds our constructed refuge.

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 neutral is terrifying because it puts in question what we think ourselves to be. Yet it is also the beginning of intimacy —a strange intimacy with the inhuman in ourselves.

## The Thing-Part

Something in us is already there before all our conceptions of being human: “the inhuman part is the best part of us…the thing-part of us…matter of God, waiting to reclaim me.”<sup>5</sup> The inhuman here is nearer to us than our own self-conceptions. When Lispector’s narrator asks, “Why shouldn’t I become unclean, exactly as I was discovering my whole self to be?”<sup>6</sup> she names the ordeal of receiving what our constructed purity had excluded. To become “unclean” is to allow the overdeterminate matter-of-God to stain the categories we use to separate spirit from flesh, human from thing. She collapses the hierarchy between human and thing. This reveals the co-identity of self and non-self, the neutral being in which we participate alongside the roach, the stone, the dust.

This “thing-part” emerges as a fundamental ground we share in being with the world. It points to what Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani Keiji calls the *self’s original part*: “Hills and rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones, all of these are the self’s own original part.”<sup>78</sup> This is the place where self and world are not yet

differentiated, pre-subjective and pre-objective. The encounter with the abject roach is not a discovery of something foreign, but a home-coming to our shared original ground.

This perspective points to neither materialism (which would reduce consciousness to mechanism) nor transcendentalism (which would separate spirit from flesh). Instead, it names an immanent divinity: the sacred as the very substance of what is. Matter is not dead stuff awaiting animation by spirit; it is *Materia-de-Deus*, the very flesh of the divine. The “original part” is our shared participation in this ground, the recognition that matter itself is the medium of the sacred. We are not souls trapped in bodies but embodied consciousness recognizing itself as always already divine substance, neutral fertility, living suchness.

Lispector’s discovery is not without terror: “it was a joy without redemption...a joy without hope.”<sup>9</sup> This is joy untethered from any counterfeit double of salvation—no promise of return, no narrative arc to make sense of it. It does not lead elsewhere. And precisely because it is without hope, it is pure: a joy that redeems only by annihilating the need for redemption.

This hopeless joy names a radical affirmation that has learned to metabolize neutrality without converting it into something else. It remains stubbornly at the level of pure affirmation—joy in suchness, in the bare astonishing fact that anything is at all. Hopeless joy arises precisely when we have stopped fleeing the neutral ground of being, when we can finally receive the great living neutrality not as dead meaninglessness but as fertile groundlessness. The neutral gives neither comfort nor promise, yet precisely in this refusal to conform to our demand for meaning, it offers something more fundamental:

participation in being's own self-subsistence.

To experience hopeless joy is to affirm being without the supplements of meaning-making, to find nourishment in what initially appears as pure poison. It is joy that has developed sufficient metabolic capacity to receive the neutral directly.

The excess of being overflows our capacity to receive it without trembling. The gift terrifies and attracts because it annihilates the prison in which the self guards its boundaries. It does not flatter our stability; it strips it away.

In this register, to encounter being is to be claimed by it, drawn into the impersonal intimacy of suchness, where self and non-self mingle, and the only fidelity is to remain porous—even to what terrifies us.

The neutral is alive with a restlessness that precedes our choices. We are constitutively needy—neediness is inherent to the neutral ground itself, not a lack to be overcome but our very structure in the midst of things. We are given to be before we give ourselves to be. This is our ontological condition: thrown into existence, exposed to more than we can claim, opened to what exceeds us.

How do we relate to this excess? How much of it can we bear? This depends on what we might call our *metabolic capacity*—how much space do we have to receive and process what overwhelms our constructed boundaries?



# The Pharmakon of Being

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.”<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> *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 concept reaches us through a philosophical lineage that reveals its metaxological character. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, King Thamus warns that writing—Thoth’s gift—is a *pharmakon* that will be both remedy and poison for memory. This idea of a fundamental ambiguity extends to the strange heteronomy of technology and even drugs, as I have explored in previous work. Bernard Stiegler extends Plato’s insight into his technopharmacology, showing how technical objects are constitutive of human becoming itself—we co-evolve with our tools in a metaxological relationship where human and world co-determine each other.

The *Pharmakon of Being* this essay proposes 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."<sup>12</sup> 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.

The ambiguity is fundamental. Being is *given* as dose (*dosis*)—an ordeal to undergo. Whether this dose becomes poison or medicine depends not on the gift itself but on our capacity to metabolize it. *Conatus* seeks to control the dose, to keep reality salted and digestible. *Passio* receives the saltless directly, exposed to being's naked actuality without protective mediation.

This is the threshold where we stand: constitutively porous, exposed to overdeterminate excess, faced with the question of whether we can bear what claims us. The ordeal is not optional—we are already given to be. The question is only how we respond to what has already been given.

## 02 The Ordeal of the Pharmakon

*“All the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born.”<sup>13</sup>*

### The Pharmakon of Being

The pharmakon—that which is simultaneously poison and cure—reaches us through a philosophical lineage that reveals its metaxological character. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, King Thamus warns that writing—Thoth’s gift—is a pharmakon that will be both remedy and poison for memory. Derrida extends this insight to show how the pharmakon reveals the undecidability of conceptual oppositions. Stiegler pushes further with his technopharmacology, showing how technical

objects are constitutive of human becoming itself—we co-evolve with our tools in a metaxological relationship where human and world co-determine each other.

The *Pharmakon of Being* operates at an even more fundamental level. Where Derrida's pharmakon reveals undecidability and Stiegler's shows co-constitution, the Pharmakon of Being concerns our metabolic encounter with existence itself. Being itself arrives as pharmakon—excessive, overwhelming, destabilizing our constructed equilibrium. What initially appears as threat to the self's integrity reveals itself as the very medicine needed for transformation. But this transformation is not gentle. It arrives as ordeal.

Lispector locates this 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."<sup>14</sup> The saltless is being without our filters and constructions, the naked actuality we cannot bear directly.

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."<sup>15</sup> *Conatus* is our striving, our effort to preserve and assert selfhood. *Passio* is our given-ness, the raw unmediated encounter with being's excess.

The body is our first dialogue partner in this ordeal. Before consciousness can comprehend what is happening, the body is already responding, already in communication with what exceeds our mental frameworks. This somatic knowing precedes and exceeds conceptual understanding, teaching consciousness what it needs to know

through direct metabolic experience.

## The Gift and Its Foreclosure

Being gives itself as pure excess, agapeic letting-be. The gift arrives without condition, without demand for return—what Desmond calls the ontological “yes” we already *are* before we know it. “By virtue of the *passio essendi* we are already participants in a primal affirmation of the good of the ‘to be’—ontologically we are the living of this affirmation before we know of it.” Simply by continuing to be, we already affirm existence. This is the elemental yes: not something we achieve but what we already participate in by virtue of being at all.

Yet this gift places us in radical vulnerability. To be given is to be finite, to be dependent, to be exposed to what exceeds us. This ontological vulnerability is not debt but the very structure of creaturely existence—the *passio essendi*, our fundamental porosity to what is beyond us.

Debt arises not from the gift itself but from our response to this vulnerability. When we cannot metabolize our ontological porosity—when the *conatus essendi* refuses the inherent vulnerability of *passio essendi*—we foreclose the gift through a futile attempt to master what can only be received. This foreclosure is what we might call “sin” as existential posture: not the acceptance of a contaminated gift but the *metabolic failure* to receive the gift.

The gift arrives as pharmakon—not because it is inherently poisonous but because our inability to receive it can make it so. 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.”<sup>16</sup> 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.

## The Violence of Grace

There is violence in grace—not cruelty, but the necessary destruction of what cannot withstand truth. Grace strikes like a knife, collapsing the ‘familiar middle’—the counterfeit refuge built by conatus—and forcing us back into astonishment.

Lispector describes losing “a third leg that kept me from walking but made me a stable tripod.”<sup>17</sup> What provides stability also prevents genuine movement. The tripod of ordinary consciousness—grounded in self-certainty, conceptual mastery, and narrative coherence—keeps us upright but immobile. The violence of grace kicks away this third leg, forcing us to learn a terrifying new way of being.

“Life was taking its vengeance on me, and that vengeance consisted merely in coming back, nothing more,”<sup>18</sup> she writes. The violence is not punishment but simply reality returning to spaces we had filled with constructions. What distinguishes this violence from mere destruction is its precision. It targets only what is false, constructed, defensive. “Every sentiment is perfect when simply a sentiment, without the mixture that thought infers.”<sup>19</sup> The violence strips away the inferential overlay, leaving the raw reality that was always there.

This violence of grace strips away our constructions, revealing

that the sense of agency itself dissolves. It's not a sense of otherness we discover but a sense of union through clear communication that turns into pure happening in which we are fully part. We become the process rather than standing outside observing it.

## Double Exposure and the Solitary One

What appears in this stripping bare is what Nishitani calls “double exposure”—reality appearing simultaneously under contradictory aspects without resolution. “The real Form of all things, including man, comes to be a ‘double exposure’ of life and death. All living things can be seen under the Form of death without thereby being separated from their proper Form of life.”<sup>20</sup>

This is not seeing death *instead* of life, nor dialectical synthesis. It is seeing life *and* death simultaneously, each fully present, neither canceling the other. This paradoxical structure finds philosophical articulation in Nishitani Keiji's concept of *soku* (即)—rendered by translator Jan van Bragt as *sive*—expressing radical interpenetration where seeming opposites mutually constitute each other.<sup>21</sup> Lispector experiences this viscerally: “I was eating myself, I who am also living matter of the Sabbath”<sup>22</sup>—simultaneously eating and being eaten, destroying and being destroyed, dying and being born. Life-sive-death in double exposure.

Nishitani speaks of “the solitary one laid bare amidst the myriad phenomena”—and when we are stripped to essence, everything becomes more real. “In bearing witness to this solitary one laid bare, each and every phenomenon is by far more itself than it is on its

own home-ground.”<sup>23</sup> The roach in its alien vitality, the neutral in its fertility, being itself in its astonishing thereness.

## Poros-Sive-Penia: The Structure of the Ordeal

Within the ordeal, we discover not mere blockage but a deeper structure: the interpenetration of poverty and passage, lack and opening. Lispector affirms this: “do not be afraid of neediness: it is our greater destiny.”<sup>24</sup> Neediness is not accidental to our being—it is our very structure in the midst of things.

*Penia* is poverty, lack, need—but not mere absence. Lispector articulates its paradoxical power: “The great emptiness in me shall be my place for existing; my extreme poverty shall be a great volition.”

<sup>25</sup> The lack is not passive but active, generative, volitional.

*Poros* is passage, way, resource—but not straightforward path. As Desmond notes, *poros* carries connotations of “a way across,” yet it is “a transition that is no transition, since in making a way, it makes way and hence there is a withdrawal in the very opening of the way.”<sup>26</sup> The way opens by withdrawing. The passage creates space through its own recession.

Both *poros* and *penia* involve emptiness. They are not opposites but complementary movements of the same groundlessness. The hyphen in *poros-sive-penia* is crucial—not “*poros* or *penia*” but the radical interpenetration where each is the condition for the other’s manifestation. This is the structure of the ordeal itself—we are suspended between emptiness that hungers and emptiness that



opens.

## Sleepwalker's Courage and the Worse Truth

Lispector demonstrates what she calls sleepwalker's courage—the ability to move beyond the compulsive need to organize and reflect: “I was courageous like a sleepwalker who simply goes. During the hours of perdition I had the courage not to compose or organize. And above all not to look ahead.”<sup>27</sup>

She writes: “Perhaps what happened to me was an understanding—and for me to be true, I have to keep on being unable to grasp it, keep on not understanding it.”<sup>28</sup> The sleepwalker doesn't strategize each step; she allows herself to be moved by what she cannot consciously control. This is vulnerability as epistemological method—knowing that acknowledges the limits of autonomous reason while remaining open to forms of understanding that exceed those limits.

This leads to what she calls “the worse truth”<sup>29</sup>—horrible not because it's false but because it confronts us with *totality*. The worse truth is the recognition that being gives itself as both beautiful and horrific, gift and ordeal, life-sive-death, without dialectical resolution. “Why would I be afraid of eating the good and the evil? if they exist that is because that is what exists.”<sup>30</sup>

And yet—here is the paradox—this worse truth is also “the best truth” because it is *truth*. It opens the possibility of what she calls “hopeless joy”: not joy despite the lack of hope, but joy that has moved beyond hope's comforting illusions. Radical affirmation won

from absolute negation.

## Consent and Its Counterfeits

The ordeal brings us to a paradox: we must consent to what we cannot control, yield to what we would never choose. We are, as Desmond puts it, “the struggle between consent and refusal...consent as an overdeterminate trust in the basic goodness of being, or refusal as an indeterminate negation of, and dissent from, being as good at bottom.”<sup>31</sup> Rilke’s “You must change your life”<sup>32</sup> names the demand our ontological porosity places on our existential self. We are already open, already porous, already given to be—and this givenness itself “must” us toward transformation. The resulting consent is not a simple submission, but what Desmond calls a gratitude “won from suffering; a ‘yes’ purged of complaint; an affirmation that has wept, as there is a mourning that is blessed.”<sup>33</sup>

The ordeal emerges because we have already consented to it—not through existential choice but through ontological structure. Lispector admits “I don’t feel strong enough to stay disorganized”<sup>34</sup>—this is existential incapacity. But she eats anyway, in dizziness, “not knowing,” having “removed from myself all participation.”<sup>35</sup> The existential self steps aside so the ontological consent can work.

But the counterfeit voice arrives immediately. “It’s hard to get lost,” she admits. “It’s so hard that I’ll probably quickly figure out some way to find myself, even if finding myself is once again my vital lie.”<sup>36</sup> She recognizes the mechanism with striking clarity: “I know I’ll need to be careful not to use furtively a new third leg that from me

sprouts swiftly as weeds, and to call this protective leg ‘a truth.’”<sup>37</sup>

Desmond warns: “Any violence here, of course, is fraught with ambiguity, indeed danger. The stripping that claims to purify might secretly derive from the indeterminate negation rather than the elemental ‘yes.’ We are a mingling of opposites, and great discernment is needed to sift them. There is an asceticism of hatred; there is a purging of love; and hatred may speak the language of love.”<sup>38</sup>

## The Purge: Metabolic Climax

The moment arrives. Lispector recognizes what must happen: “Redemption had to be in the thing itself,” which means “putting into my mouth the white paste of the roach.”<sup>39</sup> She calls it “the anti-sin,” but one that comes “at the price of traversing a sensation of death.” She rises “with the determination not of a suicide but of a murderer of myself.”

The sweat begins—not ordinary perspiration but something primordial, “a sweat I didn’t recognize and that smelled like what comes from dried-up earth after the first rains.” She’s swimming now in her “oldest primeval soup,” the sweat as “plankton and pneuma and pabulum vitae.” She has become the process: “I was being, I was me being.” This is metabolic wisdom unfolding—the body knows before the mind what transformation requires. Then the first purge is violent and entire: “I suddenly threw up the milk and bread I had eaten for breakfast... I had vomited the exaltation.” The body expels what cannot be metabolized, including the very spiritual state that would have made the act bearable, forcing her to approach it “physically

simple as a girl.”

She eats, but not through will or consciousness. The act happens in dizziness, in a space where she has “removed from myself all participation,” having “not wanted ‘to know.’” Afterward, she reflects: “So that was how things were processed? ‘Not knowing’—so that was how the deepest things happened?...Was the secret of never escaping from the greater life living like a sleepwalker?”<sup>40</sup>

Then the second purge, the spitting. “I now felt the nastiness in my mouth, and then began to spit, to furiously spit that taste of no such thing.” The Apocalypse verse surfaces: “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” But she discovers: “The neutral thing is extremely energetic, I was spitting and it was still I.” She cannot expel the neutral because the neutral is what she is.

When we allow this—when we participate in rather than resist the purge—we restore porosity. The channels that had clotted reopen. We find ourselves alive in the hyperbole. Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming, Sighing. The grammar of the *metaxu* revealed in full intensity—a language of pure verbs, of pure happening. The sovereign “I” dissolves. There is no longer an “I” who weeps or laughs. There is simply Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming.

## Reality as Communication

What is real is what communicates to us. Lispector discovers this in the ordeal: pure communication becomes more real than any conceptual overlay. “All sudden understanding is finally the revelation

of an acute incomprehension.”<sup>41</sup> The communication exceeds our capacity to grasp it conceptually, yet it transforms us nonetheless.

Lispector recognizes, finally: “The divine for me is whatever is real.”<sup>42</sup> Not the transcendent, not the beautiful, not even the meaningful—but the real itself, in its terrible and fertile neutrality. And then the admission: “I understood that, by placing in my mouth the paste of the roach, I was not stripping myself as the saints do, but was once again yearning for the accretion. The accretion is easier to love.”<sup>43</sup>

Even this radical gesture risks being counterfeit—seeking “more” when what’s needed is acceptance of the neutral. But this recognition itself is metabolic wisdom: seeing the counterfeit even in the most extreme stripping.

The violence of grace strips away our constructions. What remains is not nothing but a transformed way of knowing. In the ruins of the familiar middle, in the metabolized ordeal, something new emerges: a knowing that has learned to dwell companionably with what exceeds it.

## 03 Dark Intelligibility: The Fruits of Transformation

*“Not dark but just without light.”<sup>44</sup>*

The ordeal of the pharmakon culminates not in a final answer, but in a restored capacity for relation. The communication born from the purge deepens into something more intimate: communion. The fruit of the ordeal is not a new set of propositions about the world, but a new way of knowing that is closer to a form of touch—an *unknowing-sive-knowing* that feels like an encounter with the divine. This is metabolic knowing, and it ripens into a way of being that is both profoundly intelligent and radically loving.

### Part 1: The Nature of Metabolic Knowing

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. An understanding emerges not despite our encounter with the incomprehensible, but precisely through it. This is the domain of *dark intelligibility*, a knowing that operates by giving equal weight to the day of reason and the night of mystery. As William Desmond suggests, our daytime reason risks going mad if it cannot return to and draw nourishment from the mystery of the night. Like bats in sunlight, our conceptual mind is blinded by the very excess of being, the very source of light.

The terror of Lispector’s ordeal—the encounter with the neutral, the saltless, the “thing-part”—is the terror of metabolizing a fundamental, ontological truth. It is a direct encounter with what Desmond’

s metaphysics describes as the shadow of our createdness. Because creation is *ex nihilo*, the finite universe is constitutively “shadowed by the nothingness (*nihilo*) from which it was made.”<sup>45</sup> This is not a moral failing but our structural condition. The violence of grace is the force that compels us to confront this shadow, to taste the **nihilo** woven into our being. This is made present in Lispector’s own words: “I don’t want it. But I cannot help feeling all enlarged inside myself by the poverty of the opaque and the neutral: the thing is alive like weeds. And if that is hell, it is heaven itself: the choice is mine. I am the one who shall be demonic or angel; if I am demonic, this is hell; if I am angel, this is heaven.”<sup>46</sup>

Here lies the crucial pass-through, the bridge between a Western metaphysical tradition and an Eastern contemplative one. We must confront the terror of the **nihilo**—our own contingent, dependent nothingness—to discover the freedom of **sunyata**, the fertile emptiness that Nishitani Keiji names. The **nihilo** is the door; **sunyata** is the room. This discovery is grounded in what Nishitani calls *ontological samadhi*: a deep stillness and knowing at our core that persists even through the most violent turbulence. Dark intelligibility is learning to think *from* this recovered ground.

This knowing is not anti-rational but *hyperrational*—reason stretched to its creative limits until it becomes praise. It is what Desmond calls *thought singing its Other*. Lispector’s final words capture this perfectly: “I am not understanding whatever it is I’m saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say...And so I adore it.”<sup>47</sup> Comprehension is surrendered for communion.

## Part 2: The Ongoing Practice of Bearing More

This transformation is not a static achievement but an ongoing practice: the practice of bearing more. It is the development of a spiritual metabolism robust enough to process reality's "murky bile" as well as its joys. This practice is a form of *kintsugi*, where the break is not hidden but illuminated with gold, becoming a site of beauty and strength. Impasse, when metabolized, becomes passage. This is where we find our "worse truth": "This is madness, I thought with my eyes closed. But it was so undeniable feeling that birth from inside the dust—that all I could do was follow something I was well aware wasn't madness, it was, my God, the worse truth, the horrible one. But why horrible? Because without words it contradicted everything I used to think also without words."<sup>48</sup>

This practice is nourished by a profound, if terrifying, understanding. Simpson's analysis of Desmond provides a clear theodicy: evil is possible because agapeic creation requires genuine freedom, and freedom must permit its own refusal. The Creator's love manifests as a "patience to evil"<sup>49</sup> that "can be horrifying to us" (PU 249).

The "worse truth" is the lived, visceral experience of this horrifying divine patience. Our practice of "bearing more" is thus a finite, creaturely participation in it. This metaphysical insight provides a form of *ontological nutrition*: it does not eliminate the suffering of the world, but it frames it within a meaningful whole, providing the strength to bear it without despair. We learn to metabolize the world's darkness by aligning ourselves with the patient, permissive love that is its source.



### Part 3: The Energy of the Between

What is the fundamental energy that drives us in the *metaxu*? The answer lies in the primordial constitution of our being. We are creatures defined by a dynamic tension, mythically rendered in Plato's *Symposium* as the parentage of Eros. Eros is not a god of simple fullness; he is the child of *Penia* (Poverty, lack, our *nihilo*-shadowed need) and *Poros* (Resource, passage, our inherent capacity for opening).

We are this child. We are not troubled by desire; we *are* the trouble, the restlessness strung across the abyss between having and not-having. Our desire is constitutionally composed of two vectors:

- The vector of *Penia*: the hungry, restless reaching outward, driven by our inherent lack. It is the “plea” that Lispector says we must “infinitely increase.”
- The vector of *Poros*: the kenotic, receptive opening inward, the resource that finds a way where there is no way.

The ordeal does not create a new desire; it reveals this structure and transforms our relationship to it. Untempered, the vector of *Penia* hardens into *eros turannos*—a tyrannical grasping that seeks to fill the void with finite things. The violence of grace shatters this foreclosure. The fruit of the ordeal is the wisdom to live as this tension without seeking to resolve it prematurely. It is the art of letting our hunger keep us moving while our porosity keeps us open to being met. This is not a new desire, but a new wisdom in desire, creating what Lispector calls “a love full of fury”—fiercely alive with need, yet infinitely gentle in its reception. The root of this is given in Lispector: “The great emptiness in me shall be my place for existing; my extreme poverty shall be a great volition. I must violate myself

until I have nothing, and need everything; when I need, then I shall have, because I know that it is just to give more to whoever asks for more, my demand is my size, my emptiness is my measure. One also can violate God directly, through a love full of fury.”<sup>50</sup>

## Part 4: The Harvest: Agapeic Love and Union-in-Difference

The ultimate harvest of this transformation is a new way of loving. It begins with a beautiful paradox. On one hand, Desmond’s God gives an asymmetrical, unreturnable gift of being—a gift so total that it is “foreign...to our (all too erotic) conceptual economies”(PU 195). We can never repay it. On the other hand, the transformed experience, as described by Dōgen, is one of profound reciprocity: being “confirmed by all things.”

The resolution is the heart of the matter: our “singing back,” our act of confirming the other, is not an attempt to repay the gift. It is the most complete and profound way of receiving it. Because the gift was that we be “freely released into being for ourselves,”<sup>51</sup> we honor that freedom most fully by becoming free givers in our turn. We receive the gift of being by participating in the ongoing act of creation. Lispector articulates the ever-present temptation to foreclose this reception: “I understood that, by placing in my mouth the paste of the roach, I was not stripping myself as the saints do, but was once again yearning for the accretion. The accretion is easier to love.”<sup>52</sup>

This act of grateful, reciprocal loving is a finite participation in the infinite Agapeic Origin. Our achieved agapeic love is a creaturely echo of God’s primordial “letting the other be.” This is the meaning

of *union-in-difference*. We remain finite creatures, receivers of the gift (the difference), yet we are brought into conscious, loving communion with the divine source through our own acts of giving (the union).

When I sing the other, I find myself in love. Enchanted and chanting. The boundaries dissolve. The world becomes an inhuman mirror, showing me the matter-of-God that constitutes me. The alien becomes intimate; the foreign reveals itself as home. I long to sleep under the moss, to become compost under a thick blanket of dew, to participate in the slow, silent festivity. This is a glimpse of a singing *khora*, a mutual bringing-forth of reality where the world waits patiently for our participation in its self-manifestation.

## Coda

The question, then, was never how to avoid the ordeal, but how to bear it. We learn not through mastery, but through metabolization. We learn to receive the “superplus” of being by becoming porous enough not to be shattered by its grace. We learn to find nourishment in the very shadow of our nothingness, to discover that the pharmakon’s poison, when fully tasted, is the medicine.

The journey that began in a “sweet and abysmal vertigo”<sup>53</sup> does not end in certainty. It ends in communion. The vertigo is no longer a disorientation to be overcome, but the very rhythm of the “quiet festivity of being.”<sup>54</sup> We find our home not by escaping the between, but by learning to sing in it.

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## Endnotes

1. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 91.
2. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.
3. Desmond, *Being and the Between*.
4. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 26.
5. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 65.
6. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 67.
7. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 107–8.
8. Nishitani is quoting Muso Kokushi's *Muchu mondo* here. This concept connects to the profound Zen teaching from Dōgen's *Genjokoan*: "To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be confirmed by all things (*dharmas*).”And elsewhere in the *Shobogenzo*: "To practice and confirm all things by conveying one's self to them, is illusion; for all things (*dharmas*) to advance forward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment.”The movement is paradoxical—we must *forget* self to be *confirmed* as self, we must allow things to practice *us* rather than us practicing them. This is ontological reciprocity: the more we release our constructed selfhood, the more we discover our real selfhood as inseparable from the original part we share with all beings. (Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 107–8)
9. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 70.
10. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 83.
11. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 21.
12. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.
13. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 3.
14. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 83.
15. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 21.
16. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.
17. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 4.

18. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 16.
19. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 16.
20. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 76.
21. Van Bragt's choice to translate *soku* as the Latin *sive* captures the paradoxical identity-in-difference at the heart of Kyoto School philosophy. Unlike "or"(which separates) or "and"(which merely conjoins), *sive* expresses simultaneity and mutual constitution—A-sive-B means A is B precisely in not being B. This translation proves useful for articulating metaxological structures where opposites oscillate without collapsing into synthesis or remaining in pure duality. (Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. -intro-xxx)
22. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 135.
23. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 199.
24. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 179.
25. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 158–59.
26. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 41.
27. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 8.
28. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 8.
29. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 53.
30. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 151.
31. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 82.
32. Rilke, *New Poems*, pp. -archaic.
33. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 121.
34. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 7.
35. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 174.
36. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 4.
37. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 6.
38. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 36.
39. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 172–74.
40. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 173–74.
41. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 8.

42. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 175.
43. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 178.
44. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 89.
45. Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 269.
46. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 159.
47. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 175.
48. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 53.
49. Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 263.
50. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 158–59.
51. Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 257.
52. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 178.
53. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 29.
54. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 164.