

AFTERWORD: THE ASYMMETRY OF LOVE

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Systems cannot stop interacting with the world which lies outside of themselves, otherwise they would not be dynamic or alive. By the same token, it is precisely these engagements which ensure that homeostasis, perfect balance, or equilibrium, is only ever an ideal.

Sadie Plant¹

I. THE DISEASE OF THE ABSOLUTE

There are many ways to respond to the nihilism that is synonymous with modernity but they tend to take two prevailing forms: fascism and despair. Despair is the simpler of the two. The subject of despair sees the elimination of transcendent sources of meaning as an irrecoverable loss. There is no way back. But neither is there a way forward. With the future grasped from the perspective of what it cannot contain, and the past accessible only through a nostalgia that is as realistic about the impossibility of a return to former ways of being as it is ardent for them, all that remains is perpetual immobilisation in an unfulfilling present. The temporality of despair is characterised by this inertia—a feeling of paralysis.

1. S. Plant, *Zeros + Ones*, 160.

Fascism is more complex, and far more insidious. It emerges from the same paralysing sense of loss that characterises despair, but without possessing the latter's realism. Instead of facing the horror brought about by the evacuation of sense, value, and any guarantee of individual significance underwritten by some greater force (and perhaps even, as in Klaus Theweleit's famous study of the proto-Nazi Freikorps, an inadmissible *desire for passivity, femininity, and dissolution*),² it sublimates this horror, burying what it cannot bear to acknowledge beneath a mythology of power that reinstates the lost transcendent structure, only in a far more convoluted form. Fascism's deep sense of betrayal by the present is nursed by an inflated attachment to the past, often accompanied by theories of time and history that valorise eternity, cyclicity, or return. If despair does not end in suicide and is not overcome, it is liable to follow this path of sublimation into fascism.

In more or less overt ways, it is a passionate involvement in this problematic—how to respond to nihilism, to the feeling that there is nothing outside of oneself that can be relied upon to make sense of one's life, to modernity's 'black night of divine abandonment', without succumbing to either despair or fascism—that is the common thread running through the writings of the obscure Italian occultist collective the Gruppo di Nun. The predicament will be especially familiar to anyone engaged in contemporary online politics, but it also has a profound lineage in twentieth-century Italian history, not least as a defining moment in the personal biography of Julius Evola, one of Italy's most famous right-wing occultists and co-founder of the influential Gruppo di Ur (the esotericist group of the late 1920s which the name 'Gruppo di Nun' parodies).³ In 'The Highest Form of Gnosis', the penultimate text in

2. K. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, tr. S. Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2 vols, 1989).

3. 'The name Gruppo di Nun mirrors Evola's *Gruppo di Ur*, whose writings are a prime example of alchemical ultra-fascism. *Ur*, the upward triangle and rune of fire, representing human Will triumphing above the chaotic abyss of matter, was changed to *Nun*, deity of the primeval waters in Egyptian mythology and Kabbalistic sigil for the ocean of infinite recombination.' D. Breitling, 'Under the Sign of the Black Mark: Interview with Members of Gruppo di Nun', *Diffractions Collective*, 2019, <<https://diffractionscollective.org/under-the-sign-of-the-black-mark-interview-with-members-of-gruppo-di-nun/>>.

this anthology, 'EM', one of the members of the Gruppo di Nun (enemies of identity who we know only by their initials) narrates the event as follows:

There is a pathetic story that Julius Evola tells in his biography. He recalls an extremely desperate time in his life in which he lost the will to live. He felt as if possessed by a very negative interpretation of Nietzsche, an interpretation that had come to him from an author who he first described, in order to distance himself from him, as 'Jewish'. The depressive reading of Nietzsche had spread through Evola's life like black bile, paralysing him to the point of being unable to be or do anything. His whole macho-Aryan pose collapsed miserably as the result of a confrontation with the words of a teenager.

The teenager in question was a student named Carlo Michelstaedter, who, the day after submitting an academic dissertation entitled *Persuasion and Rhetoric* to the University of Florence in 1910, committed suicide in his family home—an act that has been read by many as drawing the inevitable conclusion of the philosophy of despair elaborated in his dissertation.

The philosophical world view presented in *Persuasion and Rhetoric* proceeds, as the title suggests, from the division of reality into two parts. 'Rhetoric' names the intrinsically deceptive conventions of worldly, gregarious existence, the common field through which, in the wake of the death of God, socially contingent meanings and values are imposed on the individual, inhibiting them from expressing their internal singularity by forcing them into an illusory form of socially-determined being deprived of any access to truth. Rhetoric is characterised by lack and a fundamental, never-ending need to fill that lack—beginning with the biological necessities of food, water, and sleep, and extending into more complex forms of desire—which projects the individual into the future: so long as we are in a state of lack, we are condemned to live in time. 'Persuasion', on the other hand, names an ideal state of fulfilment, a total absence of lack that would bring the individual into coincidence with themselves, releasing them, in their singularity, from the

hollow, worldly coercion of rhetoric, exchanging the contingent sophistry of society for access to eternity and eternal concepts, including absolute truth. But Michelstaedter concludes that persuasion is impossible to attain. Since lack is commensurate with time, short of transcending time itself there is no way to eliminate lack, and therefore living, desiring beings can never be truly persuaded. Human existence is characterised by this fundamental paradox. The only way to experience being fully is to die, but death extinguishes being. EM continues:

The account of [Michelstaedter's] work in Evola's *The Path of Cinnabar* reads like a typical Lovecraftian story. We have the protagonist who comes across a terrifying text and, word by word, begins to understand the unthinkable of human existence. Finally, he accepts the idea that reality is more monstrous and icy than he could ever have thought. The terrible text appears as the pinnacle of a masochistic prosthetics, a machine that wounds the mind endlessly, that drives you toward a mortal apotheosis until you plunge into the bowels of Hell.

After his encounter with *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, Evola's despair is total. However, unlike the protagonists of Greek tragedy that inspired Michelstaedter's dissertation (figures whose human hubris sees them pitting themselves against the absolute—against time—and losing) it is his extravagant arrogance that spares him the fate of his confrère. For Michelstaedter, establishing a philosophical understanding of persuasion is a means to the end of grasping the paradox of human finitude and cultivating an understanding of reality as inherently tragic. If anything, it is a source of humiliation, not aspiration, hence EM's characterisation of it as 'a masochistic prosthetics [...] tracing the movements and exchanges of unconscious libidinal forces *without us*'. But Evola would come to see it differently. His characterisation of *Persuasion and Rhetoric* in *The Path of Cinnabar* as 'a purified, extreme theory of "being", internal self-sufficiency and autarchy' encapsulates the

route he would take out of despair and into fascism, in so doing annulling all the subtleties of the paradox outlined by Michelstaedter.⁴ For in his idiosyncratic reinterpretation of *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, persuasion would be cast as an *attainable* state, time and desire *could* be overcome, and direct access to the absolute was not the impossible fantasy of a lost metaphysical tradition, but a concrete goal that could be worked toward through disciplined occult training, ultimately facilitating a practitioner's ascension to the state of 'Absolute Individual'.⁵ And Evola would not stop there (at the point where so many theories of intellectual intuition find their limit). His claim for access to the absolute would exceed simple knowledge of the absolute (despite his fidelity to philosophical idealism, he despised what he saw as an anaemic commitment to 'mere' epistemological transcendence in the philosophy of the Italian fascist heirs of Hegel such as his rival, Giovanni Gentile)—it would be fully and unabashedly ontological:⁶ the self truly *becomes* absolute.

In the works dating from this early period, Evola's thinking is organised around a dichotomy between passive acceptance ('spontaneity') and active control ('domination')—gendered analogues of 'rhetoric' and 'persuasion' which stand at the extremes of a scale of spiritual power. An individual's spiritual virility, which is biologically expressed in sexual and racial characteristics, determines in advance which side of the spontaneity-domination spectrum they are liable to inhabit.⁷ Accordingly, the path to the Absolute Individual, total domination, or 'freedom' (a synonym of 'domination' in Evola's terminology) is not open to everyone. Women—too passive and

4. J. Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, tr. S. Knipe (London: Arkos, 2010), 10.

5. For a discussion of the specificities of Evola's usage of this term, especially in relation to Italian Hegelianism, see P. Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 25–28.

6. 'The I—I argued—cannot be defined as mere "thought", "representation" or "epistemological subject"; rather, the I is truth, action and will. All it took to shake the foundations of abstract Idealism was to place these values at the centre.' Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 41–42. See also Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 29–30.

7. Although his misogyny, antisemitism, and white supremacism follow the most predictable contours, Evola always maintained that their source was 'spiritual' not biological.

too material—are disqualified, as are spiritually weak men, which includes those of ‘non-Aryan’ races, such as Michelstaedter. In the service of this theory, and in yet another idiosyncratic interpretation, Evola takes the key claim of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*—that (in Evola’s words) ‘all things are mediated by an “I”’—as a moral tenet, understanding the individual as actively *responsible* for that mediation and therefore able to alter the world that is generated through it.⁸ If for Kant the basic structure of empirical reality, being owed to a part of the mind that the mind cannot itself transcend, is set in advance as a feature of experience, organising the chaos of sensation into something consistent and cognitively tractable, for Evola the structure of empirical reality is understood as a constraint upon one’s ‘true will’, which, in the Absolute Individual, effectively takes the place of the Kantian noumenon, grasped not as an extra-objective ‘thing-in-itself’ but as hypostasised human consciousness.⁹ From this perspective, being subject to material suffering or natural forces and laws beyond one’s control can only be a sign of impotence and spiritual deficit, for it signals that one has failed to personally take ‘possession’ of the portion of reality that makes one suffer and to ‘nullify’ it by ‘absorbing’ its causal power.¹⁰

8. Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 50.

9. ‘To claim that an individual, as an “I” or self-sufficient (*autarches*) principle, cannot define himself as the *unconditioned* cause of representations (*viz.* of nature), does not imply that such representations are the product of an “other” (of things which are real and which exist in themselves). Rather, this condition merely suggests that the individual does not have complete control over his own actions. [...] Yet when will it be possible to truly affirm the Idealist principle that the “I” places all things? It will only be possible once the individual has transformed the dark passion of the world into a kind of freedom; that is to say: once the individual experiences his action of representation no longer as a form of spontaneity and coexistence of reality and possibility, but rather as a form of unconditioned, willed causation and *power*.’ J. Evola, *Essays on Magical Idealism*, quoted in *The Path of Cinnabar*, 50.

10. ‘[T]he [empirical] Ego must understand that everything that seems to have a reality independent of it is nothing but an illusion, caused by its own deficiency’; ‘Just as fire can affirm the will of fuel to live and blaze, so the “I” which wishes to be sovereign unto itself has the power to absorb its own non-being [i.e. all that which it does not will or determine for itself] as the matter from which, alone, the splendour of an absolute life and of absolute actions might spring forth.’ J. Evola, *Essays on Magical Idealism*, quoted in Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 28, and Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 47; see also 51. Power is important for Evola

This outlook allowed Evola to interpret Michelstaedter's suicide as a product of feminine passivity and racial infirmity, symptoms of spiritual weakness that had led the young Jewish philosopher to accept empirically constrained, passive extinction rather than striving for absolute, unconstrained, *willed* extinction. Michelstaedter's capitulation to despair misled him into carrying out what was ultimately an impotent act, for the individual who died in Michelstaedter's suicide was a mere puppet of the illusory world of rhetoric, suffering from 'a form of "ignorance" contrary to true freedom', not a fully persuaded Absolute Individual, true source and master of his own death.¹¹ But Evola was not weak like Michelstaedter. He would not 'surrender and drown in things'. He was one of the 'virile men', one of the 'heroic souls, awakened to disgust, to revolt' who 'dare[d] face the current and the undertow' of material reality and would be led by an 'ever more firm, ever more unshakeable will' to the stable ground of the far shore of being, from whose ideal fortifications, in the company of other 'strong men', he would be able to control the world.¹² 'God does not exist', he maintained, '[t]he Ego must create him by making itself divine'.¹³

As the author of 'The Highest Form of Gnosis' summarises,

because in his system (but this structure will be immediately recognisable to anyone familiar with the tenets of Hermetic Kabbalah and the Tree of Life), matter is understood to be connected to thought on a spectrum corresponding to degrees of spiritual potency. The stronger the individual's exercise of spiritual power, the more unconditioned his act of thinking is, and the less beholden to external material determination he becomes. He thus climbs the ranks of determination to take the place of the absolute, yet apparently without relinquishing the characteristic aspects of his empirical self.

11. Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 16. As EM recounts in 'The Highest Form of Gnosis', this interpretative shift was sparked by an encounter with the Majjhima Nikaya, a scripture from the Theravada school of Buddhism. Evola continued to be influenced by ideas from Eastern religions including Buddhism and Daoism, while nonetheless rejecting what he perceived to be their endemic passivity and substituting a more 'Western'—that is, 'active'—approach to transcendence. Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, 26.

12. Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 51; Evola and the Ur Group, 'Knowledge of the Waters', in *Introduction to Magic*, 19.

13. Evola, *Essays on Magical Idealism*, quoted in T. Sheehan, 'Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist', *Social Research* 48:1, 'On Violence: Paradoxes and Antinomies' (Spring 1981), 45–73: 52–53.

[o]nly a newly acquired fascist spirituality, with its humanist and supremacist dream of material acquiescence and subjective indestructibility, could put a stop to the madness of the metaphysical masochism that [Evola] had been facing.

All the real problems of modernity that Michelstaedter had attempted to confront in his thought—the absence of the gods, the loss of absolutes, the cruelty of time, the passivity of the subject in the thrall of blind material forces—were simply cast aside, and the subtle tragedy of *Persuasion and Rhetoric* was transformed into a paranoid theory of personal transcendence.

Evola would call his new philosophy—a deeply humanist voluntarism that hypostasises identity in a universe of disconcerting change—‘Magical Idealism’.¹⁴ It provided the theoretical support for the work of the Gruppo di Ur and, although Evola’s plans to use the group’s network of devotees to commandeer a level of magical influence over Mussolini capable of shifting the leader’s populist political approach to one more in tune with his own beliefs never came to fruition, and the uncompromising elitism of his thinking prevented it from being taken up in any official form by Hitler’s Nazi regime, it was nevertheless an important element in the establishment of fascist political culture in both Italy and Germany throughout the first half of the twentieth century and beyond.¹⁵ The relationship of Evola’s work to historical fascism is uncontroversial. But even more importantly for grasping what the Gruppo di Nun (along with other more mainstream commentators) has

14. Evola detested Renaissance humanism because of its association with notions of democracy and reason, both of which he was vehemently opposed to, and insisted on calling his own thinking an ‘inhumanism’, despite its fidelity to idealism, and the fact that the path to self-deification it describes transposes the empirical self into the realm of the absolute with minimal alteration. The Gruppo di Nun’s identification of it as a humanism relates to the group’s broader analysis of the centrality of human thought and will in Western magic and the privilege these faculties are routinely granted over the inhuman effectivity of matter and number. This is not the first time a deeply humanist philosophy has tried to pass itself off as ‘inhumanism’.

15. See N. Goodrick-Clarke, ‘Julius Evola and the Kali Yuga’ in *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 52–71.

identified as the contemporary return of fascism¹⁶ and for understanding the context in which the texts in this anthology are intervening, it is an extremely clear-cut example of how fascism operates in the deeper, ontological sense that Evola was so intent on laying claim to.

II. THE LONG SHADOWS OF LIMITLESS MODERNITY

[W]here will the revolution come from [...]? It is like death—where, when?

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹⁷

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari advance a theory of fascism based on an analysis of desire, drawn famously from an amalgam of the philosophies of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. As Michel Foucault writes in the preface to the book,

the major enemy, the strategic adversary [of *Anti-Oedipus*] is fascism [...] and not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.¹⁸

To be able to discern this second form of fascism—‘the fascism in us all’—it is important to understand that Deleuze and Guattari’s account of desire exceeds the petty dramas of individual needs and wants: it is

16. See Breitling, ‘Under the Sign of the Black Mark: Interview with Members of Gruppo di Nun’.

17. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, tr. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane (London: Penguin, 2009), 378.

18. *Ibid.*, *xiii*.

an account of the production of reality itself (hence the terminology of ‘desiring-production’) in the tradition of critical philosophy inaugurated by Kant. It is this cosmogenic aspect of desiring-production that makes it relevant to the history of Western Hermeticism addressed by the Gruppo di Nun in *Revolutionary Demonology*. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is immanent, material, impersonal, pre-human and—contrary to Michelstaedter and Evola’s reading of desire as lack—positive. In its actualisation, it falls across a spectrum marked out by two poles of investment—‘the paranoiac, reactionary, and fascisizing pole, and the schizoid revolutionary pole’,

one of which subordinates desiring-production to the formation of sovereignty and to the gregarious aggregate that results from it, while the other brings about the inverse subordination, overthrows the established power, and subjects the gregarious aggregate to the molecular multiplicities of the productions of desire [...] [t]he schizophrenic process is revolutionary, in the very sense that the paranoiac method is reactionary and fascist.¹⁹

The terms ‘paranoid’ and ‘schizophrenic’ delineate processes that structure and destructure desiring-production, producing and disassembling the actualised world rather than describing particular subjects or clinical diagnoses. In fact, the ‘subject’ as such is a paranoiac organisation of desiring-production, being the culmination of a series of material repressions that channel desire, turning it from a productive force into a reactive one (schizophrenia, in its clinical sense, denotes a breakdown of subjective unity, and it is this dimension of the original terminology that remains meaningful in Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the word). In *Anti-Oedipus*, the fixed and bounded notion of the intentional human subject that, as civilised moderns, we tend to take ourselves to be, arises precisely through a depotentiation of desire’s impersonal productive energy.

19. Ibid., 366; 376.

Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; *there is no fixed subject unless there is repression*.²⁰

Deleuze and Guattari lay out a very precise and complex schema (which follows the one developed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) for desire's production of reality, but it suffices to grasp desiring-production in terms of the two poles mentioned above, without collapsing them into a dualism (since dualism is a concept that is viable only on the paranoid side of the division). The schizophrenic organisation of desiring-production functions under a logic of non-exclusive difference, non-identity, and parts that are not subsumed under wholes; it dissolves borders, breaks things down, opens new pathways, undoes repression, destabilises, fluidifies, and escapes. At its limit, schizophrenia coincides with death understood as the abstract motor of change and the source of all new forms of organisation. The paranoid organisation of desire functions under a logic of exclusive difference, identity, and already constituted objects and subjects; it draws boundaries, creates hierarchies, seals off alternative routes, stabilises, congeals, and blocks escape. At its limit, paranoia coincides with fascism, it is the domain of conservation, centralisation, and the fortification of identity against the becoming that is synonymous with time—privileging 'interiority in place of a new relationship with the outside'.²¹

20. Or, to sloganise it, following Nick Land—'organisation is suppression' (an idea also dramatised in Land's mid-nineties writings as the 'Human Security System' with its 'pseudo-universal sedentary identity' and 'paranoid ideal of self-sufficiency'). Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 26 [italics added]; N. Land, 'Organisation is Suppression', Interview with James Flint, *Wired UK* 3:2 (1997); N. Land, 'Meltdown', in *Fanged Noumena*, 443.

21. Georges Bataille's explication of fascism via the word's Latin etymological root *fasces*, with its denotation of 'bundling' (and connotations of 'high office' and 'supreme power') in 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' (another important text engaging fascism on an operational rather than purely historical or political level) is helpful, for fascism is understood here abstractly and across diverse domains as the fortification and rigidification of structure (identity, the body, the state)—as it is in Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, read both as a particular study of the *Freikorpsmen* and a general study of 'irreducible human desire' (as Barbara Ehrenreich

Importantly, what distinguishes the two poles of desiring-production is not a moral judgement (morality already belongs to the paranoid pole) or a political distinction (socialists can be fascists too) but the critical differentiation introduced by Kant's transcendental philosophy in its effort to eliminate metaphysical error, or the conflation of produced objects with the conditions of their production. In 'Making it with Death', a text that deals with *Anti-Oedipus's* deployment of the tools of transcendental critique in its approach to fascism, Nick Land, whose work (both early and late) is a consistent reference point for the Gruppo di Nun, explains this mechanism as follows:

Critique operates by marking the difference between objects and their conditions, understanding metaphysics as the importation of procedures which are adapted to objects into a discussion of their constitutive principles.²²

For Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenic investments of desire align with conditions of production and paranoid investments of desire with objects of production, including the 'fixed subjects' mentioned above.²³ Schizophrenic conditions of production cannot be understood by means of concepts belonging to paranoiac objects of production, such as unity, duality, or identity, without falling into metaphysical error. This is no arbitrary decision on Deleuze and Guattari's part but the result of a recursive application of the critical method to the history of critical philosophy, whose operations,

suggests in her foreword to the book). Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 270; G. Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, tr. A. Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 137-60. Bataille also singles out the key role of identity and the superior individual in the emergence of the fascist state—effectuating an abstract 'bundling' through which a prior impersonal 'revolutionary effervescence' is negated (see sections X-XI); K. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, xi-xii.

22. N. Land, 'Making it with Death', in *Fanged Noumena*, 272.

23. '[A]s a rule, the schizoid pole is potential in relation to the actual, paranoiac pole.' Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 376.

originally understood to be the province of the thinking subject, are shown instead to be impersonal, material, and decentralised.²⁴ Through an analysis of the history of human social configurations, they go on to argue that modernity is synonymous with the operation of critique as an impersonal material process, retrospectively producing its necessity as part of a universal history that only goes one way—deeper into nihilism.²⁵ Among other things, this occasions a profound displacement of the human subject, whose true status as an object of production is revealed, dismantling the humanist pretensions of the Enlightenment and providing an ontological understanding of fascism—as a structuring coagulation based on repression.

This is consequential for Evola's Magical Idealism, and for the doctrines of Western Hermeticism more generally, not least because it structurally disbars the thinking subject from claiming any direct purchase (unmediated by matter) upon cosmogenesis, or any form of direct intervention in, let alone complete control over, reality.²⁶ For Evola, who explicitly situates his thought in the lineage of Kant, the inherent tendency of critique to diminish

24. Kant, they demonstrate, for all his brilliance, and against the impulse that drives his work, commits a metaphysical error when he transposes the empirical idea of subjective unity into his description of the conditions of the production of experience. (This error is the basis for what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as an illegitimate use of the syntheses that produce reality, which 'relate[s] use to a hypothetical meaning and re-establish[es] a kind of transcendence', Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 109). Marx and Freud, along with the other great materialist philosopher of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche, are important to the critical project laid out in *Anti-Oedipus* because they remind us of conditions of production that operate prior to the unity of the subject and the logic of identity that grounds its apprehension of itself: economic relations, the unconscious, and physiology respectively. Following their lead, Deleuze and Guattari replace the idealism of Kant, for whom (as Evola noted) reality is mediated by the thinking subject, with an account of reality production driven by an impersonal material unconscious ('in reality the unconscious belongs to the realm of physics') that cordons both thought and the subject off on the paranoid side of the object—as the *products* of material syntheses (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 283).

25. 'The "history of nihilism" just [...] being an alternative vocabulary for the same processes that we can examine as philosophical critique.' N. Land, 'The Concept of Accelerationism, Session 2' (lecture, The New Centre for Research & Practice, March 12, 2017).

26. Let alone an individual human thinker with specific characteristics—e.g. male and 'Aryan' (a very obvious example of metaphysical error, even more so when these are understood as 'spiritual' qualities).

the causal power of the subject is unacceptable, even in the muted tones of his Idealist contemporaries for whom ‘the individual does not endure: it gives way; it does not rule things, but melts within them’. The impossibility of acknowledging personal vulnerability, even as a universal attribute of the subject, leads to a predictable diagnosis: ‘This is the path of decadence.’²⁷

The equation of modernity and nihilism with decadence, a feature of much contemporary right-wing thought, nonetheless accords with Deleuze and Guattari’s prognosis. And Evola’s philosophical solution to the predicament, like every other theory of self-deification—magical, fascist, rationalist, or transhumanist—can be understood through their analysis of human desire as a mere symptom of a deeper movement of materially driven immanence. In every such theory we find a paranoid reaction to modernity’s generalised immanentisation of structure which, as exemplified in Evola’s development of the philosophy of the Absolute Individual in response to Michelstaedter’s tragic vision of existence, cures itself of its depression through illusion, misattributing the order of causes and effects, primary and secondary processes, and locating causal power in the objects of production (including the human subject), or tracing attributes from the level of these products onto the processes that produce them. Far from launching an escape, fascist desires to exit modernity are themselves already circumscribed by modernity. The desire to overcome nihilism through transcendence is absolutely, predictably, modern.

But despair and suicide are not solutions either. Even though young suicides predominate amongst their influences, the Gruppo di Nun challenges us to see ‘the world in its a-human grace without giving up our own lives, at least for a moment’; to know, during those difficult hours ‘when one realises that one is immersed in a dense darkness, so thick that it seems to preclude

27. At this point in his thinking, what makes it ‘decadent’ appears to be nothing more than an arbitrary and illegitimate (because external to the operation of critique itself) moral judgement. Evola himself does admit, while congratulating himself for his ‘boldness’, that ‘the system [he] outlined in *Phenomenology* [of the Absolute Individual] might have been accused of being based, at least to some extent, on arbitrary choices’. Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 43–44; 58.

any return to the light', 'moments of mourning, despair, or depression', 'moments suspended over the chasm of madness' when 'life seems to have lost all meaning' and the world 'which had until then revolved like a planet around the sun of an I or a We, shows itself to be no more than a collection of fragments from which, like a collage, it had emerged' that 'there is always more than *one* world and that, even from the same fragments, it is possible to construct totally different worlds'. The writings and rituals comprising this collection can be read as an attempt to furnish its readers with the tools required for just such an immense and difficult task. Because it is easy to commit suicide, and easier still to become a fascist. Contrary to what Evola thought, the path of fortification, domination, and control is the weak path. Only the strong can let go and live. Fluidity, acceptance, adaptability—these are all attributes of strength. A desire for death, whether of oneself or of others, is not the same as an exaltation of death as a great generative motor, invalidating every eternity and plunging all stable forms into the 'boundless liquid expanse of indefinite recombination'. Between the intentional subject and the 'inverted wisdom' proffered by the Gruppo di Nun, aeons of ossifying repression intervene. But all is not lost:

If only we could [...] see our desires for what *they really are*, then we would finally feel in touch with a universe penetrated by an infinite love of its own dissolution.

Standing beneath a disconnected electricity pylon—inorganic Christ, cyborg figure of post-industrial humanity, a travesty of the crucifixion—the author of 'The Highest Form of Gnosis' elaborates a ritual for tuning into this counterintuitive perspective on reality. Plotting the coordinates provided in the text's footnotes reveals a triangle of evocation surrounding Lake Varese in the northern outskirts of Milan, to be deployed, we are told, in summoning not only the disaffected voices of the landscape and culture of the Gruppo di Nun's native Italy (a blighted land stalked by demons which operates

metonymically throughout *Revolutionary Demonology* as a symbol of impurity, plurality, and anti-absolutism, fulfilling its vocation as the site of a great fallen empire and guardian of the decaying ruins of two of the West's most virulent mythologies of redemption, Renaissance Humanism and Roman Catholicism) but also voices of a less consummately human provenance, to let their black gnosis flow through us like haunted transmissions through a spirit box.

III. THE DOWNWARD ASCENT

In reality, man is passive.

Guido Morselli²⁸

Revolution is not duty, but surrender.

Nick Land²⁹

The Gruppo di Nun's reading of Michelstaedter is almost as idiosyncratic as Evola's, but in a completely opposite manner. For it is precisely Michelstaedter's acceptance of the tragic nature of existence—interpreted by Evola as weakness—in which they find succour, and which comes to ground the unique theorisation of masochism advanced in *Revolutionary Demonology*. Far from being a guide to self-deification, EM insists, *Persuasion and Rhetoric*

is a book that truly seems like an alien artefact, and one that resists all forms of categorisation and temporal analysis. It is clearly the work of an angst-ridden teenager, angry at the world and at himself, locked in his isolated room writing clumsy anathemas; but at the same time, paradoxically, it is a rigorous

28. G. Morselli, *Dissipatio H.G.* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2020), 71.

29. Land, 'Making it with Death', 287.

treatise on a higher form of black physics, a deeper and more disturbing form of entropy. It is an essay written in a language that is a pidgin of dead and living languages schizophrenically blended together, addressing a deeper gnosis of the fundamental laws of nature.

Running entirely counter to Evola's paranoiac investments, masochism names an orientation toward existence that treats an acceptance of the diminishment of control over reality in the face of the 'fundamental laws of nature'³⁰ not as a concession to be lamented, but as a *revelation*. A relief, brought about by the dissipation of an illusion so solid and prodigious it has sustained the weightiest edifices of human thought, which overflows into an experience of cosmic ecstasy rivalling that of the most devoted ascetic. 'We have been illuminated by suffering' will become a kind of mantra that resonates throughout the Gruppo di Nun's writings—whether in the context of a retelling of creation myths in which the price of cosmogenesis is the compromised integrity of an ancient chthonic monster, more often than not depicted as female and representing primordial chaos or unstructured matter, violently dismembered by 'some male solar deity syncretised with the figure of the King', whose screams resound endlessly through the whole of creation, or as the conclusion of a harrowing personal account of the nausea and sensory torment that accompany chronic migraine; in the wordless discipline of the bodybuilder or the transports of various heretics and saints, such as Christina the Astonishing, who, having died numerous times, is repeatedly forced by God to return to the earth and suffer the company of a humanity she despises, or Teresa of Ávila, who employs the same effusive vocabulary in her descriptions of religious rapture as she does in her accounts of paroxysmal sickness.

30. The Gruppo di Nun have a complex and nuanced understanding of what is meant by 'nature' which should not be confused with the conservative use of 'nature' or the 'natural' to justify the maintenance of a status quo. See 'Dogma', 'Catastrophic Astrology', 'Spectral Materialism', 'Gothic Insurrection', 'Gothic (A)theology', and 'Mater Dolorosa' in this volume.

What is perceived in these moments of illumination—revealed not by the brilliance of an Apollonian sun but the refraction of an Artemisian moon—what is celebrated, even, is the ‘wound’ at the heart of matter. An originary, material volatility whose unconditioned and effervescent creativity has, since the dawn of time, been channelled, constrained, solidified, stratified, organised, and repressed through a sustained series of congelations to form stars and planets, the geological stratifications of Earth, the evolutionary developments of organic life, human civilisation, language, reason, the notion of the autonomous subject, and all the triumphs and the terrors of the human mind. From this process of accumulative extrusion and rigidification—which the Gruppo di Nun, following the cryptogenealogical path opened up by Daniel Barker,³¹ understands as a ‘continuous propagation of *traumas*’, both phylogenetic and ontogenetic, material and conceptual—the human emerges ‘not so much as the apex of a developmental process, but rather as the ultimate receptacle for universal suffering’. Far from being gods, we are merely the residue of the progressive depotentiation of initial cosmic possibility, built out of catastrophes and doomed, along with the rest of the universe, to terminal dissolution. Pain, therefore, operates as a trans-catastrophic vector that can be used to travel masochistically back in time,³² regressing through the succession of encrustations upon which the stability of the forms and ideas that make up what we take to be ourselves and the world is founded, to make contact with the ‘Prima Materia of the ocean of Nun’—‘black primordial magma’, ‘liquid darkness’, cradle and grave of all things.

As CK reminds us in ‘Cultivating Darkness’,

[o]ur fragile partiality emanates from chaos—matter itself is this chaos and this hidden inscrutability—but multiplicity and lawlessness, hidden in the innermost core of things, also vibrate in the human soul. However frustrating,

31. See ‘Barker Speaks’, in Ccru, *Writings 1997–2003*, 155–62.

32. *Ibid.* On pain and chronotaxis, see also Moynihan, *Spinal Catastrophism*.

insubstantial, insane, or laughable all of this may be, there is only this fatality, this concordance between the unravelling of the real and the dissolution of the world. And if there were any teleology, it would only be the passage from a vague foreboding of doom to a scream full of horror.

Here we are firmly in the nightmare of Magical Idealism's rigid, unyielding, and immaterial *I*, with its paranoid objective of 'bind[ing] and freez[ing] the Waters' of this chaotic and senseless materiality and of 'rescuing' from it 'something stable, impassive' and 'immortal'.³³ Yet, like the migraine sufferer in 'Mater Dolorosa' who suddenly understands, at the peak of her misery, as if it has come to her in a vision, that '*bodies* are unstable', rather than recoiling at this horror and seeking to exert their control over this instability, the masochist seeks out experiences that expose them to the ephemeral materiality of the world—its indifference, its senselessness, its inexorable entropic destiny—only in order to love it more furiously. Hence the paradoxical motif of the 'downward ascent': the highest form of gnosis lies in the deepest machinations of matter. What we really want, what *she* wants to realise in us—Apophis, Nibiru, Tiamat, Nemesis, Malkuth, the Infernal Mother, *Stilla Maris*, Virgin of Sorrows, Our Lady of Tears, Femboy Remus, the Black Goddess, the Whore of Babylon, the matter that screams in our blood...chaotic and multiplicitous *Nun* the Uncreator, in her many guises—is not stasis, disembodiment, transcendence, and a guarantee of eternal identity and power, but *transformation*. A fluidity emblematised by the great iron ocean that interminably churns at the centre of the earth, a remnant of the status of the globe in its entirety before its ancient ebullience was smothered by the cooling crust. Through the counterintuitive nature of their art, the masochist seeks to accommodate an inversion that will vent the psychic and material pressure built up around this primordial wound, perforating the solidity of the illusions that press upon it, to attain an 'anti-gravity' that might propel them toward that 'enigmatic alien attractor' that calls from the

33. Evola and the Ur Group, 'Knowledge of the Waters', 19, 18.

darkness of the sidereal void. This is the insight revealed in the subversion of the Thelemic formula 'Every Man and Woman is a Star' that names the ritual with which the book begins: 'Every Worm Trampled is a Star'—it is our suffering that makes us glow.

But the 'spark of anti-gravity' that each 'living form bears within itself' cannot be released through a mental act, whether that involves an expansion or diminishment of the powers of the conscious mind. In this respect, the Gruppo di Nun's notion of masochism also operates as a critique of 'the meditative experiences commonly sought in initiatic traditions' whose purpose is to bring about 'states of absolute concentration that obliterate individual consciousness and elevate it to a state of consciousness that we might call cosmic or universal'. A practice indispensable to the magical doctrines of self-deification which Evola and his collaborators in the Gruppo di Ur rehashed and which the texts in this book call ceaselessly into question, along with the longstanding insistence on coding matter as feminine and consciousness as masculine, with the latter consistently posited as the privileged term. For the masochist's ecstasy, whether obtained through Barkerean geotraumatic regression, Sparean Atavistic Resurgence, or Saturnalian revelry in the queer clubs of Remoria, is always embodied and 'radically feminine'. Opposed in every way to Evola's solipsistic philosophy of mental 'domination' and control, it denotes a material practise of anti-mastery, a discipline of release and letting go.

Consequently, in the apocryphal 'Lifting the Absolute', penned by the pseudonymous 'Bronze Age Collapse' (catastrophic Nemesis to the Sun of erstwhile alt-right internet phenomenon and bodybuilder Bronze Age Pervert), the practice of weightlifting is presented as a means not of transcending matter, but of reconnecting the body to a primary material dynamism that has been lost through millennia of reactive inertia, symbolised by the dumbbells that the bodybuilder lifts, in so doing propelling themselves, with each repetition, away from the sclerotic torpor of God and back through the body to the centre of the earth, melting themselves down in a rite of

cosmic devolution consecrated by fire, sweat, and iron: ‘What a bizarre turn of events for philosophy, for the body to become the voice of the spirit and the source of all wisdom!’

The role granted to matter as the terminus and goal of the masochist’s magical and devotional labour is contrary to the path laid out by the bulk of Western esoteric systems, for which matter is precisely what is to be sloughed off in order to ascend to a purely mental dimension that coincides with the consciousness responsible for inaugurating the cosmos. Following the lead of Ccru,³⁴ the Gruppo di Nun rejects this hierarchical organisation of being, as diagrammed in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, where an immaterial unified mind unfolds into an increasingly multiple and material world, its initial purity progressively debased in the process, with the Tree being typically interpreted as a map to be traversed in the reverse direction by the magical practitioner or alchemist as they extract themselves from the contingency of the material world and work toward the completion of the ‘Great Work’.³⁵ Instead, the cosmos of the Gruppo di Nun, ‘like a golem self-assembled from mud, is born and extinguished in the materiality of the processes that produce it’, which are ‘essentially devoid of human intentionality’.

The Kabbalistic hierarchy of emanation is questioned with particular intensity by LT in ‘Mater Dolorosa’, via the relationship between the highest and lowest feminine sefirot, Binah and Malkuth, whose conspiratorial dance of rupture and conjunction in the *Zohar*’s description of reality’s unfolding betrays an esoteric resistance to its straightforward arrangement on a spectrum that runs from immaterial mind to embodied matter. The complex interactions between these two sefirot reveal a tendency

34. See ‘Part 8: Pandemonium’, in Ccru, *Writings: 1997–2003*, 239–553.

35. ‘This focus on the human mind, and its enhancement through practices such as concentration and meditation, often results in the celebration of consciousness as a God, even when the individual self is annihilated. In our view, proposing the existence of an anthropomorphic and immortal ultra-consciousness, accessible only to the few through an esoteric path of illumination, is not only delirious, but inherently fascist.’ Breitling, ‘Under the Sign of the Black Mark: Interview with Members of Gruppo di Nun’.

to self-organisation and nonlinearity native to the feminine aspect of the Kabbalah that is concealed by an otherwise exoteric linearity, in which the feminine is characterised merely ‘as a passive and receptive aspect of the process of emanating divine light’. LT identifies the repression of this independently active, schizophrenising, non-hierarchic nonlinearity by a dependently active, paranoiac, hierarchic linearity as a consistent feature in the doctrines of the Right Hand Path, whose system, as the Gruppo di Nun asserts in ‘Dogma’, although founded on a contingent and insidious humanist hallucination that functions to impose and maintain ‘a highly organisational and hierarchical force aimed at establishing a pyramid with Man on top, be it an absolute monarchy legitimised by God, a Nazi-fascist dictatorship, a white ethnostate, or a meritocratic society dominated by the figure of the cisgender heterosexual white male’, is simultaneously presented as the sole, necessary, and universal truth of the cosmos.³⁶

The Gruppo di Nun counter the doctrinal supremacy of the emanationist hierarchy reinforced in the diagram of the Tree of Life with the ‘tri-triangular seal’, a ‘decapitated’ reconfiguration of the original decimal structure from which the highest sefira, Kether (‘the Crown’) has been removed.³⁷ Once emancipated from the tyranny of this immaterial sovereign, a second diagram can be discerned within the ruins of the Tree of Life. The remaining nine sefirot arranged in three sets of three, interpreted statically, compose three triangles of evocation (the triangle being the shape traditionally used for summoning demons), with each, as we are told in ‘Mater Dolorosa’, relating to one of the three ‘apocalyptic female aspects’—‘the Dragon’, ‘the Celestial Virgin’, and ‘the great Babylon falling in flames’—which when deployed in concert with the ritual text of ‘Every Worm Trampled is a Star’ function as an evocation of the Dismembered Mother Tiamat—the Great Mother of creation, but now decoupled from the masculine power that is supposed to mould her flesh

36. For the Gruppo di Nun’s explanation of their usage of the traditional magical distinction between the ‘Right Hand Path’ and ‘Left Hand Path’ see page 14 in this volume.

37. See page 2 in this volume.

into form, and therefore, via an appropriation of Jung that affirms rather than condemns independent ‘unripe’ female sexuality, an avatar of ‘non-heterosexual or non-conforming womanhood, of the woman who evades the reproductive patriarchal order, refusing to take on her role as Great Mother and dialectical counterpart to male consciousness’. Interpreted dynamically, with the first sefira ‘Ammit, The Devourer’ in the position of Binah, and the ninth sefira ‘Tiamat, The Worm’ in the position of Malkuth, the nine sefirot together form a ‘sinister spiral’, a ‘circumference without centre’, a ‘divergent series from the heart of which issues forth a vast and boundless chasm’. In this model, the mundane sexual dimorphism and obligatory heterosexuality upon which, almost without exception, every Western magical system is based, are refused and replaced with various economies of non-reproductive desire—lesbian, virginal, sodomitic, xenophilic, inorganic, mitotic (*Revolutionary Demonology* contains at least one text devoted to each)—revealing a ‘monstrous, headless machine which advances irreversibly’ on its own terms, without the intervention of some primordial form-giving masculine counterpart, ‘suffocating the structure that generated it’.³⁸

For the Gruppo di Nun, dismantling the heterosexual reproductive economy that subtends Western esotericism is part of larger onslaught directed at the idealist dogmas of symmetry, stasis, and equilibrium that sustain the latter’s doctrines. As LT points out in ‘Catastrophic Astrology’, heterosexual reproduction, despite its superficial heterogeneity, is an enforcer, not only of the banal homogeneity of the self, but also of the ‘human’ as an eternal form—reifying, through the idea of genetic inheritance, the resistance to

38. The heterosexual reproductive model of cosmogenesis is another example of metaphysical error: ‘But what is even more interesting to us is the social and political outcome of this arbitrary cosmology that results in the establishment of what we may define as *cosmological sexism*: gender is not only a set of more or less reasonable social rules, but it is elevated to an inescapable axiom underlying reality, that poses polarization as a boundary condition for the existence of the universe.’ Breitling, ‘Under the Sign of the Black Mark: Interview with Members of Gruppo di Nun’.

change that any system in equilibrium seeks to maintain, and mobilising this reification in a way that is structurally analogous to religious doctrines of personal redemption:

In my nightly terrors, I had often considered my own disintegration, dissecting in every possible way the paradoxical insanity of being an individual, and then being no more; but there was something strangely reassuring about the idea of dying as a part of the universal cycle of Nature, as if in an eternal wildlife documentary where death is perfectly compensated by new life and equilibrium is forever preserved. I was never truly Catholic. I was raised not to believe in any God, but there was something religious about the way I was taught to approach Nature as a redeeming force of heterosexual preservation: the sun sets only to rise again; we die, only to leave room for our offspring to thrive and carry on our legacy. As a cisgender girl approaching puberty, I could finally access salvation by consecrating myself to the natural cycle of heterosexual reproduction.

Economies of non-reproductive desire are demonic economies—‘the demonic’ indexing for the Gruppo di Nun the multiplicity of forces that act on the human from a position alien to it, transforming it from a conservative system perpetually seeking to maintain equilibrium to a dissipative system open to the transformative potential of its outside; ‘a dimension which is external to the order built by humans but which, at the same time, is capable of violently breaking into this order, upsetting its fundamental axioms’.³⁹ LT’s reverie ends not with a vow to uphold the heterosexual perpetuation of the same that promises salvation, but with an affirmation of demonic love for Apophis, an asteroid which shares its name with the Egyptian serpent-god of the Netherworld, and which, at the time, was understood to be on a deadly collision course with Earth.

39. Ibid.

Far from reassuring us of a comforting symmetry between the microcosm of ‘Man’ and the macrocosm of the universe, the Gruppo di Nun maintains that the relationship between ourselves and this demonic outside is disconcertingly *asymmetrical*. For why would the deep machinations of the universe reflect empirical structures already familiar to us or conform to the repudiation of our personal and very human fears? Why would the conditions of the production of objects reflect specific features of those objects? What insane anthropocentric hubris lies behind the Hermetic maxim ‘As Above, So Below’?

The asymmetrical cosmology of the Gruppo di Nun can be summed up in a formula from ‘Every Worm Trampled is a Star’: ‘Order descends into chaos. Light fades into darkness. No structure is eternal’. The beginning and the end of the universe do not resemble one another, and the processes that generate the world are not identical to the world. This is the ‘black physics’ intuited by Michelstaedter and consolidated in the second law of thermodynamics, which tells us that

[n]ot only is it not possible to convert energy without losing it as ‘background noise’ into the universe—everything that happens, any phenomenon that takes place in any corner of the cosmos, is a process in disequilibrium. Everything rushes in a specific direction; nothing is reversible; under no circumstances can we return.

Entropy is fundamental to the occult system of the Gruppo di Nun, not least because it disproves the human fantasy of order without chaos or the preservation of structure over and against the blind flux of material dissolution that draws the universe inexorably toward heat death. Yet its counterintuitive nature can make it difficult to countenance—just as modernity produces the paranoid-fascist illusion of identity, stability, power, and control, entropy produces the illusion of equilibrium:

We can explain our attachment to the concept of equilibrium in accordance with our nature as limited living systems: we require an internal order to be maintained to guarantee our survival and the functioning of our machines; the amazement we experience before our organic organisation is a deceptive feeling that conceals a misunderstanding of the true cost of our existence. We want to believe in conservation because, faced with the evidence of our inevitable disintegration, we seek a theory that makes life less futile, but above all less unnecessary; a universe in disequilibrium confronts us with the realisation that we are but a spontaneous and frantic proliferation of molecular machines that burn, consume, multiply and die, in an ineluctable and meaningless dance.

The fantasy of perpetual equilibrium is paranoia translated into energetic terms. Like paranoia, it constitutes itself through a repression of transformative potential. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that the Gruppo di Nun understands its consecration in the doctrines of the Right Hand Path as part of a deliberate ideological strategy in a long running occult war between the ‘the radical immanentism of a materialist neo-magic’—for which the cosmos is asymmetrical and equilibrium is therefore a local, secondary, and ephemeral effect of a deeper entropic law of uncreation, maintained through an open and unrepressed relationship with its outside—and the ‘absolute idealism of an esoteric fascist tradition’—for which the cosmos is symmetrical, and equilibrium is therefore posited as a universal, primary, and constant feature of reality, maintained through a repressed and disavowed relationship with its outside:

[a] closed, self-subsistent cybernetic system that maintains perfect equilibrium is a dead system (i.e. it ceases to be a system); or else it contains *hidden mechanisms* that place it in a condition of absolute dependency upon that same *outside* from which it desperately seeks to emancipate itself.

Because of this asymmetry, the various figures of inversion and reversal that appear throughout *Revolutionary Demonology* are ‘revolutionary’ in a way that might not at first be apparent. The inversion of evolutionary history in the masochist’s practice of regression and the bodybuilder’s devotional return to matter; the inversion of light and knowledge explored in ‘Solarisation’ which, via their excess, yield darkness and unknowing; the inversion of ‘phallic’ Rome in a sprawling, sunken Remoria, celebrated by VM as ‘the city that would have been born if, in the ancient fratricidal legend about the origins of Rome, Remus had won instead of Romulus’; the inversion of civilisation and the atomised individual in the faceless barbarian hordes, ‘wild myriads, born of chaos’, that ‘Gothic Insurrection’ prophesies will one day be the harbingers of a new and inhuman world; the reverse philosopher’s stone that has the alchemist crashing backwards through levels of successive sublimation toward the Black Sun of primordial *nigredo*, or even an inverted Tarot that terminates with the Fool, symbol of a world ‘founded on an absence of foundation: plummeting, never touching the bottom’—all of these are ‘non-reciprocal’ inversions. Inversions based on asymmetry that unveil a repressed substrate of an existing regime rather than inaugurating a substitute regime, equivalent in status but opposed in content to the original. They are demonic in the sense that in each, contact is made with the outside of the system in order to open it up to transformation. The thermodynamic description of the relationship between Rome and Remoria exhibits the asymmetrical mechanism clearly: ‘[i]f the Rome of Romulus is the city in which energy is put to good use so as to continually fertilise and reproduce what already is, Remus’s Remoria must be the city of expenditure, of *dépense*’. Rome is not the opposite of Remoria, but its repression.

Non-reciprocal inversion is a principle whose real world political application does not require great stretches of imagination to comprehend.⁴⁰ It is, moreover, very different to the figures of inversion that those versed in

40. Magic *is* politics in the sense that, at its most esoteric levels, it is always dealing with questions of the production of reality.

the Western magical tradition will already be familiar with—a necessary innovation, as the Gruppo di Nun will maintain, since any inversion based on symmetry is ultimately ineffectual when mobilised tactically in the occult war against the paranoid hetero-patriarchal hegemony of the Right Hand Path that they see themselves embroiled in:

The principal mistake committed, more or less deliberately, by the vast majority of those who tried to trace a Left Hand Path in opposition to that indicated for centuries by the Hermetic tradition, was that of doing no more than working toward a reversal of the dogmas of the Right Hand Path, evidently ignoring that a system endowed with total symmetry remains, by definition, identical to itself whichever way it is turned.

[Hence, the] Hermetic Kabbalah is appropriately armoured against any attempt at sabotage from within. Under no condition will it ever be sufficient to invert any symbol proposed by the Right Hand Path—from the Tree of Life itself to crosses and pentagrams—in order to obtain something radically different from its original meaning.

‘Every Worm Trampled is a Star’ is dedicated to ‘our sisters of the Left Hand Path’ and the Gruppo di Nun consistently present themselves as allies of this typically subversive and unorthodox strand of magic on the condition that its relation to the Right Hand Path is not understood as one of simple symmetrical inversion:

The only way to trace a path toward an alternative esotericism is to definitively break the symmetry of the Hermetic Kabbalah, proposing a new system based upon entirely different symbols and connections.

The figure that comes to define the abyssal asymmetry of the Gruppo di Nun’s entropic cosmos in *Revolutionary Demonology* is love. This is not the

mundane love of the ‘the BDSM romantic comedy’ of subjects and objects that keeps us trapped within familiar categories of identity and modes of social interaction—forms of love constrained by the hetero-patriarchal economy of equilibrium and symmetry. It is not the immaterial love of religious ecstasy whose price is the repudiation of matter and the denigration of the flesh. It is not the countervailed love of magical traditions such as Thelema, which seeks to balance the decentralised passivity love symbolises in its system by placing it in a dualistic relationship with a centralised and active will.⁴¹ Love, for the Gruppo di Nun, is far more difficult, obscure, and encompassing. They define it simply as ‘the thermodynamic property of bodies that attracts them to their death’—a ‘[p]rimordial hunger’ that is ‘the cryptic and telic structure of reality itself’ and the enigmatic answer to the questions they pose at the end of ‘Dogma’:

How can we reach a darkness so radically and frighteningly alien to everything we know? How can we think of approaching its black fire without being destroyed?

It names simultaneously that blind and insatiable material striving that is at the heart of Michelstaedter’s tragic vision of existence (and which drove Evola to the brink of a despair that he could only overcome through fascism), and an orientation toward dissolution that not only accepts it as a primary feature of reality but is also able to access, by relinquishing anthropocentric fantasies of the centrality of human ‘will’, a cosmic perspective from which the irredeemably entropic character of the universe can be understood in all its spontaneous, autonomous, and unsentimental richness.⁴² In the words of

41. See above, 282n3.

42. It is important to note, in passing (as this could easily be the subject of another essay of equivalent length) that despite the centrality of entropy to their thinking, the Gruppo di Nun do not assume a linear-progressive model of time. In fact, they understand linear time as a ramification of the ‘absurd’ circular model their critical approach to equilibrium attempts to dislodge: ‘The relevance of equilibrium in the magical tradition is related to the idea of absolute *reversibility*,

their beloved Georges Bataille, '[t]here can be anguish only from a personal, *particular* point of view that is radically opposed to the *general* point of view based on the exuberance of living matter as a whole.'⁴³

The predicament we began with—how to respond to the nihilism of modernity without succumbing to despair or constructing a paranoid fantasy of control whose function as a shield against the terror of divine abandonment, impotence, and personal insignificance can never be fully avowed—is resolved, for the Gruppo di Nun, through a recalibration of the relationship between the intentional subject, the world, and 'the iron laws of thermodynamics' that indefatigably assemble and disassemble them. What Michelstaedter and Evola understood in negative terms as lack is celebrated as a positive, joyous, and effusive force of cosmic uncreation and recombination. Because of love's asymmetrical primacy over the subjects and objects it actualises and de-actualises—as *effects* not *causes* of cosmogenesis—their passivity is an ontological fact. Acknowledging this passivity, accepting the spontaneity of existence⁴⁴ and being capable of grasping it as a strength, in turn opens one up to the positive virtuality of a self-determining matter:

that is, the notion that the past is entirely preserved in the future, and the future completely contained in the past, forming a never-ending circle in perpetual motion, where the active principle (*Will*) and the passive principle (*Love*) are eternally chasing each other. This duality is only resolved in God (*consciousness*), that can be thought as the static *point within the circle* in which this motion converges. This view of the cosmos as an equilibrium of polarities is rooted in our cultural substratum to the point where it is perceived as *natural* and, therefore, sacred and immutable. We believe, instead, that this notion of equilibrium conveys a clear political agenda, and that, far from being a perfect *theory of everything*, it contains arbitrary—and even absurd—assumptions. The absurdity of circular cosmology is, put simply, that it relies on perpetual motion, and thus denies the evidence of time as a material drive towards disintegration. This is expressed in the patriarchal project of *progress* as conservation and accumulation, which, being absolutely unsustainable, can only be realized through time sorcery.' Breitling, 'Under the Sign of the Black Mark: Interview with Members of Gruppo di Nun'.

43. G. Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, tr. R. Hurlay (New York: Zone Books, 2 vols., 1991), vol. 1, 39.

44. Evola's technical definition of 'spontaneity' as 'non-self-centredness' or an absence of intentional subjecthood ('leaving one's internal throne empty') which he identifies as 'ultimately the principle of nature' is shared by the Gruppo di Nun, who assert, for instance, in 'Dogma' that '[t]he universe is by definition spontaneous; the spontaneity of things is independent of our will'.

Love is the door that allows us to reconcile ourselves with darkness, provided that we understand its true meaning, and that we do not make the mistake of subjecting it to our individual consciousness, transforming it into a play of mirrors. Confronted with a thermodynamic universe, we understand that every moment of our existence is the spontaneous fruit of a wonderful proliferation to which we belong entirely.

Love, therefore, is an ‘already accomplished anti-politics’, a politics without an image of the subject or the world. And nihilism, far from being an adversary, is the motor of love. For it is only through the consummate destruction of transcendent values and meanings, and the definitive elimination of the need for validation from some external or divine authority, that new values and meanings—new subjects and new worlds—are able to come into being. Nun’s entropic embrace keeps us safe, protecting us from the tyranny of sedimented regimes of power (the ‘historical fascism’ that does not cease to haunt our social configurations), and releasing us from the stranglehold of our own accumulated repressions (the ‘fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour’).⁴⁵ Since love is opposed to conservation, not as a contrary operation but as what conservation represses, there is no equivalent countervailing force—no active ‘masculine’ will—able to balance or constrain its devotional labour of infinite uncreation. Nun reigns alone, nourished by her own intrinsic multiplicity.

However, while Evola sees it as something to be overcome through ‘domination’, the Gruppo di Nun, in line with their rejection of the fantasy of equilibrium that underwrites the plausibility of Evola’s Absolute Individual, understand ‘spontaneity’ as a necessary component of an inexorable and living rite that, whether we are aware of it or not, we are all participants in. Here they quote Nicola Masciandaro: ‘[T]he verbal root of spontaneity, PIE **spend-* (to make an offering, perform a rite, to engage oneself by a ritual act), contains this sense of sacrifice and self-offering, just as we speak of the spontaneous as something “surrendered to”, as to a whim. The spontaneity of authentic transformation is also thus a species of death, of surrendering to the expiration of what is untenable.’ Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, 54, 44; Masciandaro, *On the Darkness of the Will*, 34.

45. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xiii.

The Gruppo di Nun disbanded only a short time after the period of intense and sustained collaborative effort that furnished these texts. Whether in relation to the publication of these translations or to other matters, all our attempts to reach them have been met with silence. But before having succumbed to the entropy they loved so fiercely, they succeeded in their aim of ‘tracing a path toward an alternative esotericism’, questioning the fundamental premises of the Western magical tradition, reconceiving the way that difference and reciprocity are typically understood within its doctrines, and offering a model of cosmogenesis based on an entirely different logic to that of the heterosexual desire that has for centuries inhibited the ability of magical practitioners to really and truly ‘traffic with the outside’. In the wake of this work, strange new occultisms based on alternative models of desire are given space to flourish—queer, alien, inorganic—bound by a love that knows nothing of subjects or objects, only a hunger so tremendous that it will not be sated until it has devoured time itself.

If a single message could be distilled from *Revolutionary Demonology* it would be that there is always another world hidden in this one. A claim whose guarantee does not lie in the redemptive promise of a new dawn but in the black incandescence of the long shadows of limitless modernity—a darkness that reveals all the monsters that hide in the light. Like every city that ‘conceals within the folds of its geography a latent Remoria that pushes for the inversion to take place’, we too contain the repressed doubles of ourselves: alien vistas to be revealed through the masochistic discipline of giving in and letting go—for ‘only while we fall inexorably into our dissolution can we fulfil our destiny and shine’.

For Nine.