Landas 28:2 (2014) 45–76

TRAVELLING IN THE SECULAR WASTE LAND

de Certeau and the Irruptions of the Mystical

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> In this decayed hole among the mountains
> In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
> Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
> There is an empty chapel, only the wind's home.
> - T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*[1]

I. Introduction

Charles Taylor offers a somber sketch of our present spiritual and religious situation: "one is either thoroughly in this world, living by its premises, and then one cannot really believe in God; or one believes, and is in some sense living like a resident alien in modernity. Since we find ourselves more and more inducted into it, belief becomes harder and harder; the horizon of faith steadily recedes."[2] He points out that man's frames of knowing are altered at the dawn of modernity, closing off any relation or openness to the

[1]T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," in Frank Kermode, ed., *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 68.

[2]Charles Taylor, "Closed World Structures," in Mark A. Wrathall, ed., *Religion After Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58.

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transcendent. This delimits the reach of the human experience and orients it to a naturalistic frame. It is in this closure that Taylor locates what he will call the secular age: an age of loss and exile precisely because belief in the transcendent becomes unthinkable (or at the very least difficult to achieve) and what replaces it is a plurality of the modalities of human flourishing.

We also see a multiplication of different modalities of religious belief and practice—what Taylor calls a "nova effect"[3]—as characteristic of this situation. One sees this nova effect in phenomena as diverse as new-age spiritualisms and the resurgence of religious fundamentalism in various parts of the world to the rise of secular humanism and militant atheism. In the wake of this plurality of views, Taylor nevertheless proposes that the challenge of this age, despite the unthinkability of belief, is the need "to enlarge our palette of such points of contact with fullness."[4] In an illuminating study on the 16th and 17th century mystics, Michel de Certeau presents a possible point of departure: "[Mystical discourse] suggests a way of entering those ageing texts and surveying the movement of their modes of writing against the background of today's issues."[5] In an attempt to provide a cogent response to Taylor's challenge, we can ask: how can mystical discourse and its textualities provide us a mode of dwelling in the so-called secular age?

Attempting to answer this question requires two steps. First, we shall be mapping out the conditions of belief and unbelief that Taylor elaborates, specifically with regard to the diversification of the varieties of human fullness, i.e., the proliferation of different ideas of "the good life" after the modern turn towards naturalism and the

[3]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 66.

[4]Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 729.

[5]Michel de Certeau, "Mystic Speech," in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 81.

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moral subject.[6] This will set up what Taylor will call "the nova effect" and will give us a picture of the state of contemporary religious belief, which in turn will lead us to the second step: the place of the mystics in contemporary religious discourse. We shall be utilizing Michel de Certeau's analysis of mystic speech and writing in uncovering certain themes—specifically, narratives of exile and excess—that can serve as signposts in reclaiming a sense of spirituality in a time of crisis, as the mystics did in their "dark nights." Elaborating on the mystics will hopefully provide a response to Taylor's challenge to "enlarge our palette on such points on human fullness" and point to the possibility of reclaiming a place that, at the "twilight of the idols," has become vacuous and deserted. What is at stake, in the final analysis, is a new possibility of dwelling in an age of loss.

II. A Spiritual Crisis?

Nietzsche paints a picture of the state of contemporary religious belief in *The Madman*:

> Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breadth of empty space? … Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves?[7]

Nietzsche's madman, we are led to see, leaves as he says, "This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—*and yet they have done it themselves*."[8] Robert Pippin notes that this parable (if one were to call it one) "has come to represent and sum up not just

[6]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 52.

[7]Friedrich Nietzsche, selections from "The Gay Science," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. & trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1982), 95.

[8]Nietzsche, selections from "The Gay Science," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, 96.

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the unbelievability of God in the late modern world, but the 'death' of a Judeo-Christian form of moral life, the end of metaphysics, or the unsuccessful attempt to end metaphysics, or even the end of philosophy itself."[9] Despite the plurality of interpretations that abound from Nietzsche's account, it cannot be denied that he speaks of a particular form of life that has become difficult to attain: that of a religious life. The contemporary age, at least most prevalent in the so-called Western world, can be characterized by a certain degree of impossibility in sustaining religious belief or, at the very least, a suspicion in the belief in what is usually referred to as "God." What is striking in Nietzsche is that he puts the blame on humanity for this "death of God." This does not mean, however, that humanity was directly responsible for "murdering" God; what is suggested is simply the fact that the human person and his or her way of living had something to do with the gradual withering away of our traditional conceptions of God. Far from the usual narratives of the triumph of science over religion, or of the success of reason over myth and superstition, what we are confronted with in our contemporary age is *a change in the conditions of belief and unbelief* such that these conditions have made religious belief increasingly difficult, and in some places, even impossible. It is this alteration of the conditions of belief and unbelief that allows us to call our age, even if only provisionally, a spiritual *crisis*: a moment of decision (*krinein*) that becomes available because a plurality of choices has been made apparent due to the change in conditions.[10]

[9]Robert Pippin, "Love and Death in Nietzsche," in Mark Wrathall, ed., *Religion After Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

[10]As Taylor would note later, this crisis has taken on different forms, most especially of what others would call a "return of the religious." Such a rise in the apparent plurality of religious worldviews refutes, at least for Taylor, the thesis that increasing secularization has led to a more marginal sense of belief which will eventually lead to its own demise. He even points out that this age is dominated by a concern for "spiritual wholeness" which makes manifest the change in the conditions of belief and unbelief. See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 506–507.

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How did the human condition come to this? What shifts in the history of thought brought about this crisis? Charles Taylor, in his landmark book *A Secular Age*, offers a redefinition of what is traditionally called "secularism":

> the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it is virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. … Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.[11]

This redefinition is striking since it shows us 1) the socio-political context in which belief and the activity of believing in God are situated in, and 2) how such a belief (or lack thereof) involves some degree of human agency, i.e., one *chooses* to believe such-and-such. This modality of secularism is helpful for our goal in this essay since Taylor shows a genealogy of the concept of religious belief, and the conditions of the permissibility and impermissibility of such a belief. In short, the contemporary crisis reveals a history of confluences that leads to what we are confronting now.

Something peculiar happens in modernity. For Taylor:

> [The] new creation of a civilized, "polite" order succeeded beyond what its first originators could have hoped for, and [this] in turn led to a new reading of what a Christian order might be, one which was seen more and more in "immanent" terms (the polite, civilized order is the Christian order). This version of Christianity was shorn of much of its "transcendent" content, and was thus open to a new departure, in which the understanding of the good order (what I call the "modern moral order") could be embraced outside of the original theological, providential framework, and in certain cases even against it (as with Voltaire, Gibbon, and in another way Hume).[12]

Modernity marks the era wherein the unchallenged claims to moral and spiritual order by Christendom are faced with the relatively new entry of the discourse of self-sufficient humanism, which for Taylor

[11]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

[12]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 63.

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refers to a mode of humanism that accepts "no final goals beyond goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing."[13] He argues that the rise of science at the turn of modernity paved the way for a more radical and fundamental shift in the human being's mode of comportment with the world: "the power of materialism today does not come from the scientific 'facts,' but has rather to be explained in terms of the power of a certain package *uniting materialism with a moral outlook* [my italics], the package we could call 'atheist humanism,' or exclusive humanism."[14] More than merely the rise of science and the age of discovery, we also see in modernity the fusion of the horizon of the purely materialist and naturalist account of the world with that of the question of "the good life." As we shall see later, any inquiry into the good life—at the height of modernity—cannot but exclude God from the picture.

Taylor traces this fusion in the gradual formation of a robust ideal of a human being capable of his or her own actions and, consequently, the "hardening" of this capability not only to be the author of one's own actions but also to *regard* the world according to this capability. In short, we see the "human" taking center stage—a fixed reference point not only for the intelligibility of the world but also for the meaningfulness of the human being's place in this order. But this state of affairs was not always the case. For Taylor, this relatively modern invention was a far cry from what was traditionally considered to be the *status quo* in the order of the cosmos. One could say that before the modern turn, God's activity in the world was implicated in the numerous human dealings and structures that made up society, not to

[13]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 18. It must be clear that Taylor himself considers other approaches to understanding this phenomenon in modernity, such as the rise of science and the scientific mindset, but he considers these approaches inadequate for the purpose at hand, which is to describe *how* the conditions of belief changed from one of naïve acceptance of a theistic interpretation of the world order to one of doubt because of the existence of viable and rational alternatives. These alternatives might include the scientific mindset, but they are in no way *constitutive* of these mindsets. See Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 54–56.

[14]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 58.

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mention becoming a reference point in the whole order of the cosmos.[15] A reference to God made up the architecture of the cosmos; the natural world was a creation of a benevolent Being, and the human being had to find her place, so to speak, in this order.[16] It is thus tempting to think that the transition from pre-modern and medieval societies to modern ones concerned itself with a gradual suspicion and decline of the involvement of God with the dealings of humanity. But as Taylor points out, this perceived "subtraction theory" is far too simple a schema that uncritically pits humanism against theism:

> That I am left with only human concerns doesn't tell me to take universal human welfare as my goal; nor does it tell me that freedom is important, or fulfillment, or equality. Just being confined to human goods could just as well find expression in my concerning myself exclusively with my own material welfare, or that of my family or immediate milieu.[17]

The fusion of the materialistic world view with that of the question of the moral order is meant to show precisely this: that the bifurcation between modern "enlightenment" and "traditional" religious beliefs becomes an inadequate tool in understanding how exactly we ended up with our contemporary age. For Taylor, placing the "human" as the central reference point does not at all mean that old regimes of religious belief are now invalidated; on the contrary, it becomes the point of departure—a necessary postulate, if you will—in understanding how exactly the conditions of belief get reconfigured in the modern age. One cannot understand the so-called "secular age" without inquiring about the role played by human agency.

Despite the relatively modern invention of what we can call the "hard conception" of human agency (authorship of actions), we find traces of it, surprisingly, in religion and religious practice. Ruth Abbey

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[15]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

[16]Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 125.

[17]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 61.

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links Taylor's insights in *Sources of the Self* with his work on secularism and points out that the gradual insulation of the self from the perceived "outside world" can be traced to techniques of self-control that were proliferated by neo-Stoics such as Justus Lipsius.[18] Abbey continues: "In order for humans to be sole guarantors of order and good conduct in the world, they needed not just a view of their technical capacity to change themselves and their world, but also an argument about motivation."[19] Practices of self-control and inwardness proliferated in the centuries leading up to the modern age: Taylor points to, among others, Meister Eckhart and Thomas Kempis as having emphasized the value of inward life and private prayer for cultivating one's personal faith.[20] These moves towards the inward life can be said to be, as Taylor points out, an attempt to "make the faith relevant," so to speak, as the gap between the elites and the masses was becoming more and more incommensurable (it was not a surprise that most clergymen were elites during that time).[21] The explicitly religious motivations of the turn towards an inner life (as distinguished from *inwardness*, as I will clarify later), among a host of other reasons[22] such as the various injustices committed on the part of the Church hierarchy, provided the necessary fodder for a much-later development that would shake up the Latin Church: the Reformation. To be sure, those who advocated the inner life surely did not have a total re-ordering of the whole Latin Church in their minds; but the public nature of these developments—how

[18]Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 206. To be sure, such an interpretation cannot be taken to be definitive of the entire Latin Christian tradition. One has to point out that this is one of many (probably disjointed and unrelated, but nonetheless important) developments in early Christianity in regard to which Taylor will talk about the self later on.

[19]Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 207.

[20]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 70.

[21]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 70.

[22]Interestingly, Taylor also points out that the "enchanted" worldview and the subsequent attempt by the Church to capitalize on this enchantment also led to the Reformation. For a summary of his views, see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 75–76.

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the disenchantment was made more apparent in the attempt by the Church to suppress them—led to a multiplication and the eventual homogenization of the concept of the believer.[23] This uniformity—that *anyone* can attain the *inwardness* of a religious life—sets the stage for what Taylor calls a "buffered self" that will eventually develop into the Cartesian vision of the *cogito* reaching out to the *res extensa*, which will animate much of Western modernity and set its language—one of subjectivity and agency.[24]

I have used *inwardness* in contrast with *the inner life*. What merits us this distinction? A detailed explanation of "the inner life" will come much later, but for now, inwardness can be taken to mean not just an introspection but also—as we have alluded to earlier through Abbey—an attempt at articulating a motivation for such a move: one can legitimize one's move precisely because the resources of such a move are not found "outside me" but are present within me as my *inherent capabilities*. And so the story goes for religious belief: at the turn of modernity, one "discovers" these inherent capabilities—one can choose to believe such-and-such. But this is not mere anthropomorphism; for Taylor, this phenomenon is closely tied—as with the Reform spirit—with the rise of the belief that one is entitled to inwardness and selfhood *that is given by God*:

> Disbelief in God arises in close symbiosis with this belief in a moral order of rights-bearing individuals, who are destined (by God or Nature) to act for mutual benefit; an order which thus rejects the earlier honor ethic which exalted the warrior, as it also tends to occlude any transcendent horizon.[25]

So what we have is not really an invalidation of the belief in God; what we have is a more complex and nuanced web of relations and

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[23]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 77.

[24]Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 143.

[25]Taylor, "Closed World Structures," 63. Taylor sees this as the point of departure for many deist theories where God gradually assumes an impersonal and indifferent persona, and the universe becomes an order made by God that is waiting to be discovered.

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motivations that provides the tools for one to think that religious belief is *one* choice among other choices. God still figures in one's life but it sets in motion the gradual decentering of God and the replacement of the "human" at the center of all reference. This decentering of God did not mean the retreat of God from the public sphere; what we have is God's marginalization in the face of a new "center": man and his or her relation with the impersonal order of the universe. This, most precisely, is the progenitor of exclusive humanism. Moreover, it also reveals a fundamental difference with that of the old world order of enchantment and cosmic order: the closure of the transcendent horizon.

Here we come full circle: why exactly does the transcendent horizon close up? Or, we can ask: how does it occur that the move towards inwardness in turn closes off the horizon of the transcendent? We turn to the fusion of naturalistic-materialist thinking and the vision of the good. If before it was a matter of "finding oneself" amidst the order of the cosmos, we now experience a reversal: the order of the cosmos is dependent upon my agency, because to exercise my agency is part of the blueprint of Nature. In other words, the vision of the good coincides and fuses with the naturalist (that is to say, indifferent) picture of the cosmos. One has no need for "vertical" transcendence because the good is to be found in what can be experienced in nature and in the immanent world. Thus, we see how the transcendent is closed off with the shift of focus towards the autonomous individual, away from the idea that the "good" can be contemplated as an intimation between the human being and the cosmos.[26] These models of inwardness and self-legislature were to become the paradigms of thought that translated themselves in terms of social transactions and architectures: "The fact that both society and politics came to be seen as self-grounding and self-reproducing points to yet another way in which what was once transcendent—the source of social order—became immanent and

[26]Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 152.

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secularity became further entrenched."[27] It is in this multiplication of immanent frames that the agent now finds herself or himself. From the untenable position of unbelief in the medieval times, we see a shift in the conditions of belief and unbelief: the pluralities of individual human flourishing.

And thus we get a picture of the contemporary age: an age where there is a manifold of possibilities for thinking about—and acting on—the good life. Taylor, as we have seen, locates this pluralized vision of the good in the transformation of the modern moral subject as the author of his or her own actions. We have also seen that it is in this transformation that the transcendent horizon— a "vertical conception" of the good life—gradually becomes more and more difficult to sustain. This is not to say that religious belief is on the decline; on the contrary, a buffet of "contacts with the transcendent" abound, as evidenced by what various scholars refer to as the phenomenon of the "return of the religious."[28] But what is telling here, Taylor argues, is that these varieties are grounded on human concerns and human aspirations, thus producing the *illusion* of reaching out to this transcendent: from new-age spiritualisms to the oft-used label of "spiritual but not religious," this illustrates what Taylor calls "the nova effect":

> Then there came … within the context of the modern moral order … a viable alternative to belief, of forms of exclusive humanism, in turn followed by a multiplication of both believing and unbelieving positions …. This all generated the challenge, undermining, and dissolution of the early social forms which embedded God's presence in social space.[29]

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[27]Abbey, *Charles Taylor*, 208.

[28]Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in Jacques Derrida & Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion*, trans. David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 42.

[29]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531. He also discusses the epistemic roots of this frame in the latter chapters of *A Secular Age*:

> What we share is what I have been calling "the immanent frame"; the different structures we live in: scientific, social, technological, and

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What is apparent in this nova effect is the lingering doubt that abounds, even for the staunchest believer—more than due to the plurification of choices which makes it possible to think of an "otherwise," we also see that a suspicion of traditional confessional religious belonging abounds simply because the social space where that belief is practiced no longer holds as much legitimacy as before. To believe in God is not the only option available, thus reconfiguring the space for belief.[30]

Despite this, Taylor also sees a positive import in this phenomenon:

> The very fact that its forms are not absolutely in tune with much of the spirit of our age; a spirit in which people can be imprisoned, and feel the need to break out; the fact that faith connects us to so many spiritual avenues across different ages; this can over time draw people towards it.[31]

The argument here is that one does not need to "recover" the conditions of belief and unbelief before the modern transformation (the delineation was not that clean, anyway), but whether, in this age of crisis, a path may be taken that "enlarges our palette" with contacts of fullness, that is to say, human fullness and fulfillment that do not depend *solely* on individual human flourishing. What is at stake here is the possibility of *choosing* to open up to the transcendent in the midst of the secular waste land, which in the final analysis is a "return" to the religious, but a return, in the words of T. S. Eliot, to "where we started / And know the place for the first time."[32]

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so on, constitute such a frame in that they are part of a "natural", or "this-worldly" order which can be understood in its own terms, without reference to the "supernatural" or "transcendent." (594)

[30]Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 531.

[31]Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 533.

[32]T. S. Eliot, "Four Quartets," http://www.coldbacon.com/poems/fq.html (accessed March 18, 2014).

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III. Retrieving the Mystical: The Locus of Language

Notwithstanding the increasing interest in mystical literature and what is commonly called "mysticism", one should be careful in proceeding with a study on the mystics, let alone what constitutes as "mystical experience," if ever it can even be studied in its phenomenality. We can ask: what exactly constitutes the "mystical"? Jean-Luc Marion notes that the term, "especially in the academic domain where rationalism seems to encompass every possible form of rationality," has been identified as either a purely subjective supra-essential experience, or as a term that escapes any kind of scientific rigor.[33] One can even accede to the fact that the term "mystic" has acquired a pejorative sense, becoming a euphemism for what is generally referred to as "crazy." For instance, in his *Through a Glass Darkly*, Ingmar Bergman paints a very vivid picture of this perception with Karin, the film's protagonist, who is overcome by a vision of God—she proclaims, "I have seen God. He is a monster," right before she is whisked away to a waiting helicopter for treatment. It is therefore safe to say that a study of the mystics in the secular age will be, at the very least, quite difficult, and asking about what constitutes a mystical experience may seem like a chimeric pursuit.

But one has to ask: is there really *a* concept of the mystical, much less mystical experience? Grace Jantzen notes that the Christian West has understood the mystical "in a variety of times and places" and that the notion of the mystical as an entirely subjective and absolutely private experience only flourished in modernity, where it eventually established itself as the paradigm in understanding what exactly constitutes "the mystical."[34] She further notes that the very concept

[33]Jean-Luc Marion, "Introduction: What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'?," in Michael Kessler & Christian Sheppard, eds., *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, trans. Gareth Gollrad (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

[34]Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Mysticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 323. It must be noted here that Jantzen seeks to sketch a genealogy

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of "mystical experience" only entered the grammar of religion in modernity, when the power and the cosmological hegemony of the Church were diffused and reconfigured according to the secular state.[35] If one were to investigate the "mystical," one cannot confine oneself to an investigation of the mere phenomenality of experience because one cannot but run up to one's own discursive construction of what *counts* as mystical experience. Here Marion, in his attempt at sketching the limits of objective phenomenality and the possibility of opening up to what he calls "the saturated phenomenon," will rightfully agree:

> Saturated phenomena should not be constituted at all, and what we experience with them is precisely an intuition overwhelming any possible concept. This is not because the saturated phenomenon is irrational, but because we are unable to be rational enough to produce concepts matching the intuition that is nevertheless in fact given.[36]

We can therefore say that "mystical experience" exists, but not in the modern sense of "experience," that is to say, experience of the object corresponding to the intuition.

There is, however, one more location—a discursive site, if you will—in which "mystics" can be investigated without sacrificing

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of mysticism within the question of gendered power. It is striking, nonetheless, how Jantzen, even before Asad and Taylor, anticipates the discursivity of religious concepts in modernity, and how such constructions influence how we generally understand religion not only as a concept unto itself but also in relation to the secular. For instance, she notes that:

> It was only with the development of the secular state, when religious experience was no longer perceived as a source of knowledge and power, that it became safe to allow women to be mystics. Thus it came about that when mysticism became constructed as private and personal, having nothing to do with politics, it was also possible to see it as compatible with a woman's role as the "angel of the house," servicing her husband and children not only physically but spiritually as well. (Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Mysticism*, 326)

[35]Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Mysticism*, 326.

[36]Marion, "Introduction," 5.

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the rigor of analysis to mere fantasy formations: the textualities of *mystic literature*. In his *The Mystic Fable*, Michel de Certeau outlines this historiography of the mystics:

> The mystic groups and books nevertheless constitute a specific historical reality. Although, from that point of view, they appear in the formal guise of absence—a past—they are amenable to an analysis that sets them within a multiplicity of correlations among economic, social, cultural, epistemological, and other data. To establish these coherences (correlation is the instrument of the historian) is to preserve the difference of the past from the seduction of partial resemblances, from generalizations suggested by philosophical impatience, or from continuities postulated by genealogical piety. … It comes from many a sojourn in these remote corners of the past that reveal to the historian the infinitude of a local singularity.[37]

The inevitable reduction of history to text bears an inherent danger of treating historical events and actors as mere objects of study: "What gets called 'history' (a school subject, a professional practice, a type of television programme, and so on) consists of ordering and commenting on documents."[38] This tendency in historiography establishes the space of power of the surveyor, who looks at her objects of study. The text then becomes a formalist narrative unity that is enclosed upon itself; language is idealized as an object of study, and it serves as a mere tool in trying to "understand" the meaning of a historical event.[39] De Certeau points to this new historiography precisely to look at the subjects or

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[37]Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago, Il: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9.

[38]Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), 23.

[39]What is apparent here is that the very neutrality and surveyability of the space of the Expert is itself a construction of the modern conception of objectivity. De Certeau makes a more forceful diagnosis in *Culture in the Plural*: "The anonymous universalism of the city, of culture, of work, or of knowledge develops the impossibility of being situated as different and of reintroducing alterity—hence conflict—into language" (*Culture in the Plural*, ed. & intro. Luce Giard, trans. & afterword by Tom Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 33).

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actors that are *implicated* in the linguistic tactics of the text. In other words, de Certeau looks at how the text is made possible (and therefore only possible) within a nexus of institutional networks that allow for an actor—in our case, the mystic—to practice the writing of the text without reducing it to a representational space of objective study.[40] He wants to refocus the study of history away from the point of view of the expert, and into the practical space of discourse in which writing is first and foremost considered as a *practice*: "[mystic language] is the effect of an elaboration upon existent language …. The uses that define it reflect the operations carried out by speakers."[41]

De Certeau begins his analysis of the mystics: "Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mystics proliferated about a loss. It is the historical figure of that loss, making readable an absence that has multiplied the productions of desire."[42] Paradoxically, rather than revealing the corridors of power that allow for the proliferation of what is generally

[40]Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*, 33. Furthermore, this "writing of history" is, for de Certeau, always situated in an economy of institutional power and influence that provides the space for permissible and impermissible actions, where the agent (de Certeau will later call him the *everyman*) navigates and negotiates through these spaces. His method, therefore, aims to show how the *possibility* of knowledge is also a *production* of knowledge. Thus, in *The Writing of History*, de Certeau says: "Only a theory that articulates a practice can be accepted, that is, a theory which on the one hand opens the practices to a space of a society, while on the other it organizes the procedures belonging to a given discipline" (Michel de Certeau, "The Historiographical Operation," in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley [New York: Columbia University Press, 1988], 57). It is in this sense that the text—that is to say, the operations of language in a text—becomes a site for a historiography of the mystics precisely because it is these texts that we encounter, and this encounter could not have been possible without these negotiations within institutional and historical spaces. As Highmore says, "When historiography embraces this aspect of production, the changing history of an event, the mutability of its meaning, can become the object of reflection" (Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture*, 35).

[41]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 141–142.

[42]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 13.

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referred to as mystic literature, what characterizes this historical period in terms of religious discourse and mystic writing is the *ambiguity* of the institutional structure of the Church:

> It reiterates at the level of biographical experience all the vocabulary of the Church reformation: division, wounds, sickness, lying, desolations, and so on. Individual bodies tell the story of the institutions of meaning. The end of a world is postulated in all of the spiritual poetics. Their bright and daring trajectories streak the night sky, from which they have been removed by pious collectors of mystic traces. They are written on that blank page from which we must relearn to read them.[43]

The theological[44] grammar that constitutes the space for permissible and impermissible discourses in Christendom undergoes a drastic shift at the dawn of modernity, and for de Certeau, he takes up the specific timeframe of the 16th–17th centuries as a reference point for this shift:

> Learned clerics were being separated from the common folk, and administrative power was becoming more highly organized and centralized. As theology became more professionalized and international, its knowledge became more technical. The divisions between different ecclesiastical levels of authority were politicized, and secular law was becoming autonomous. Rural culture and rural "devotions" were increasingly isolated from the emerging urban bourgeoisie.[45]

These shifts in the social order bespeak of a change in social relations: from the *corpus mysticum* that defined much of pre-modern discourses on the legitimization of institutional practices, most especially Eucharistic

[43]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 14.

[44]I use this term liberally, as it is also clear how the word *theology* can lend itself to meanings that may not have made sense to these authors. For instance, Marion notes that there was, strictly speaking, no concept of theology before the advent of modernity (or, for Marion, the Suarezian systematization of metaphysics); there was only *vera philosophia*, where *verus philosophus est amator Dei*. See Jean-Luc Marion, "On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy," *Budhi* 1 & 2 & 3 (2009): 52.

[45]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 85.

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and liturgical practices in which the body is the site of an absence (Jesus Christ), the "mystical body" now becomes the hierarchical institution of the physical Church, a stand-in for the absence of the body that legitimizes the discourse of what counts as *religious*.[46] This change in perspective in the final analysis reorders the productions of knowledge, which in turn establish the range of permissible and impermissible interpretations of religious practices; divergent discourses are institutionalized and marginalized according to the relations of power that serve as their condition of possibility. *Only in this context* could the mystics have arisen, and it is only at the turn of modernity that we can understand "mystics" as the place of a loss.

For the purposes of this essay, we can point out two general—though not entirely representative—themes that we find in mystic literature that point to its context and possibility: the themes of exile and excess. It is this dual-hermeneutic of expulsion and saturation that can serve as a schema for the analysis of the practical space of mystic speech.

The term "mystics"—at least in the 16th century onwards[47]—came to refer to groups of people, even if indeterminately, who were without a place or, better yet, who *lacked* a place: "The noun 'mystic' seems to have made its appearance within and in reference to groups that were furthest removed from the theological institution; like many proper nouns, it first took the form of a nickname or accusatory term."[48] From the ecclesiastical point of view, the mystics came to be known as

[46]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 81–82. De Certeau makes a further case that the bifurcation of Church and Scripture and their respective co-constituencies with the Sacramental Body allows for the mystical "third term" to serve as the space for the manifestation of both ecclesiastical and Scriptural economies in the mystical body. See de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 85.

[47]The specificities of the history of how "mystics" came to be understood are too complex and drawn out to be mentioned in this paper. De Certeau himself undertakes this task; see his *Mystic Fable*, 79–112.

[48]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 107.

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"moderns,"[49] those who inaugurated a "new" form of discourse. Even from the Reformation movement, Martin Luther himself discredited mystical practices as being symptomatic of the hierarchical and sacramental (i.e., symbolic) valuation of Christianity.[50] It is therefore safe to say that the mystics were a marginalized group within the socio-political shifts of power within the Church and the *saeculum*. This marginalization comes at a time of socio-cultural change: for instance, the rise of the German mystics such as Angelus Silesius also coincided with the rise of the urban bourgeoisie, depriving the former of a privileged position in Church matters, which for de Certeau "allowed for greater independence from religious authorities."[51] Apart from the shifts in social classes, the High Middle Ages were characterized by three major linguistic mobilizations: 1) the formalization and the technicalization of Latin (most apparent in the institutionalization of Latin in universities); 2) the rise and spread of the *use* of vernacular languages,[52] making bilingualism a linguistic trait of that era; and,

[49]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 109. He quotes Marais and Boileau as speaking of the mystics as moderns who "are not found in the ancients."

[50]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 95. Fanning also notes that mystical practices within the Reformation movement "stiffened the Protestant mistrust of such phenomena" (Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* [New York: Routledge, 2001], 139).

[51]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 85. This, of course, was accentuated by the fact that the Inquisition was at its height.

[52]This was accentuated by the increasing usage of the printing press, making the dissemination of their works easier and more convenient. Both de Certeau and Fanning point to Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros as helping in the proliferation of mystic literature during the 16th century. This, of course, also helped spread the idea that mysticism is for everyone and not just the educated elite. This goes to show how the factors underlying the productions of knowledge influence not only value assignments to objects but also the idea of what is implicated as "right" for a human person in that particular economy. See Fanning, *Mystics*, 149.

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most importantly, 3) the increasing mobility of texts via *translations*.[53] It is then of no surprise that mystic literature abounded on the frontiers not only in terms of socio-economic classes but also in terms of geographical location, where encounters with other cultural traditions were commonplace.[54] This rapid mobility of the productions of knowledge and the fragmentation of one's identification with one's "natural" or "home" language set up the possibility of a "new" mode of discourse—what de Certeau calls "ways of speaking"—that would characterize mystic speech. It is a way of speaking that does not find its home, denied by the institutional power on the one hand and forged and explored in a foreign land on the other.

This *excursive discourse* reveals the space that allows us to see not only the context but also the internal struggles of these mystics who were excluded by the institutional power that disallowed for the legitimacy of their discourse. Thus, we also see a diversification of the modes for articulating this exile, for various modalities of literary genres and styles also populated mystic literature. Examples of these are the autobiographical style of Teresa de Avila, "fictional itineraries," and "points for reflection" or rules, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignacio de Loyola, among others.[55] These narrative styles

[53]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 116. De Certeau specifically cites Henri de Herp's *Spieghel der Volcomenheit*, first published in 1477, and its subsequent translations in different vulgar languages as examples of this high rate of textual mobility. This did not only allow for the rapid dissemination of the work; it also created hermeneutic spaces where distinctive discursive practices could abound.

[54]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 85. Both de Certeau and Brague note the significance of the "new Christians" movement (converted Jews) in Spain during the sixteenth century, and how these movements of conversion also influenced the productions of knowledge—in our case, mystic literature and, for Brague, the intermingling of people who belonged to different religions (Judaism) which allowed for its dissemination in the Christian world. See Rémi Brague, *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 22.

[55]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 120.

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speak not only of their exile from the foundations of meaning—the hierarchical Christian Church—but also of their act of solidarity with the gradual disintegration of the Christian hegemonic order.[56] This seemingly paradoxical situation also gives birth to mystic utterance: the founding of a language that could articulate the "language of God" within the fragmentation of society and language into its vulgarities. The mystical subject is thrust *in medias res*, between the acceptance of the irreparability of things past and, at the same time, the possibility for an articulation of a renewal of faith in the midst of the gradual withering away of the institutions of meaning. In one of de Certeau's celebrated studies, he focuses on a Jesuit mystic named Jean-Joseph Surin in order to elaborate this characteristic in mystic writing. He quotes Surin from his *Lettres*:

> This image will seem like only a hollow thought to others, like a dream my mind made up, because the natural, common sense upon which our faith is built bolsters us to such a degree against these things of the other life that, as soon as a man says he is damned, the others judge that it is only madness.[57]

The mystics were deeply aware of the changing circumstances of their times, and their search for God led them to articulate their own spiritual poverty and to confront and dwell in their own decadence.[58]

But it is in this search for God in the midst of loss that they are founded by an experience of the Divine. One can discern the theme of *excess* being co-constitutive with the experience of exile latent in mystical texts. For instance, Teresa de Avila would often speak of "a feeling of the presence of God [that] made it impossible for me to doubt that he was within me, or that I was totally engulfed in Him. This was

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[56]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 86.

[57]Michel de Certeau, "Surin's Melancholy," in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 102.

[58]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 86.

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no kind of vision."[59] An encounter occurs in mystical utterance: the mystical subject in the midst of the disintegration of the institutions of meaning on the one hand, an Other that irrupts in the scene on the other. Here a dialogue is sought after: "The rupture, ambiguity, and falsity that plurality spreads throughout the world creates the need to restore a *dialogue*."[60] One never engages in mystic speech by oneself, as with soliloquy; one is always at the behest of an Other that (always) overdetermines one's speaking. Thus, de Certeau would speak of mystic literature as "not written" because "it writes itself,"[61] although by saying that he is not reverting back to an esoteric mode of utterance. Bearing in mind what we have so far discussed, we can see that this auto-biography (self-writing) is itself a production of the context of their time, in the search for this Other that in the end allows for their speaking. Ultimately for him,

> the *I* is both figurative and a figure, a symbolic representation. The figure, the third and last element to be discussed, is not utterative, except disguised as an image. It is, rather, an organizing factor. It marks in the text the *empty* place (empty of world) where the other speaks, following a process the discourse describes by *recounting its own production*.[62]

The *I*, therefore, becomes the site where the Other irrupts. But what defines this irruption?

A characteristic element in mystic writing is the overdetermination of meaning, an excess of intuition. We have already noted earlier with Marion that it is this "saturated phenomenon" that may characterize the mystical experience. We also find this inscribed in mystic literature. For instance, we see in John of the Cross how the "dark night of the soul" eventually comes up to

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[59]Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1957), 71.

[60]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 88.

[61]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 97.

[62]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 94.

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> the enkindling of spiritual love in the soul, which, in the midst of these dark confines, feels itself to be keenly and sharply wounded in strong Divine love, and to have a certain realization and foretaste of God, although it understands nothing definitely, for, as we say, the understanding is in darkness.[63]

Images of darkness and supra-essential light, taking inspiration from Dionysius the Areopagite, populate mystical literature, locating a place "beyond my homeland" that is unnamable. And it is precisely this encounter with the Divine that takes up the *I*: it is not merely one who speaks, but God. We can borrow from Meister Eckhart in the 14th century and speak of this as the "birth of God within oneself"—*theogenesis*—that best characterizes this overdetermination of meaning.[64] Once again, it is in mystic textual practices that we are allowed to posit this "new beginning":

> Mystics are engaged in a politics of utterance …. This kind of "politics," like contemporary rhetoric, sets forth operational rules determining the relational usage of a language that has become uncertain of the real. It *reconstructs*, where the ontological relation between words and things has come undone, *loci* of *social* communication.[65]

The overdeterminations of meaning, apart from their autobiographical comportment, also serve as tactics that attempt to articulate a new beginning within the decadence of the Church. This "new beginning" is not at all an initiative of the agent: "The 'I' is 'formed'—by its act of willing *nothing* or by (forever) being incapable of doing what it wills—as a 'desire' bound only to the supposed desire of a Deity."[66] It is then of no surprise that a transformation occurs at the moment of encounter—"mystical union"—where the *I* is taken up by its dialogue

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[63]John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans., ed., & intro. E. Allison Pears (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 141.

[64]Reiner Schürmann, *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, trans. & comm. Reiner Schürmann, foreword by David Appelbaum (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), 73.

[65]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 91.

[66]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 92.

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partner, who is none other than God: "With his gentle hand he wounded my neck and caused all / my senses to be suspended."[67] The usage of the *I* in mystic utterance does not only refer to the mystical subject taken up by God; it refers to nothing else but God himself. The identification of God with the *I* is also itself a veil: one can never know of the face of God.[68] This establishes the clear continuity with tradition—"No one has seen God" (Jn. 1:18)—while at the same time subverting it through the textual tactics of mystic writing: "I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I reclined on the Beloved."[69]

In the final analysis, these descriptions of excess and exile "articulated the experience of an *elsewhere*, but within the tradition they adopted."[70] The mystics had to show their communion with the Church of God while at the same time distinguishing themselves from the decadence of the time. It is here that we are shown the ingenuity of mystic literature—the practice of subversion through writing or, in de Certeau's words, "the power to induce a departure."

With this excursus regarding mystic utterance and tactics, we are now in a position to return to our main question: how can mystical discourse and its textual inscriptions provide us with a mode of dwelling in the so-called secular age?

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[67]John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, 30.

[68]As Marion notes, "he remains God only on condition that this ignorance be established and admitted definitively" (Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology'," in John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999], 34).

[69]John of the Cross, *Dark Night*, 30. De Certeau also notes that the mystics relied heavily on Sacred Scripture, showing how these groups were still operating within the tradition of the Church. See de Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 98.

[70]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 22.

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IV. The Irruptions of the Mystical in the Secular Waste Land

What can we learn from the mystics of the 16th and 17th centuries? To be sure, the social and material conditions that gave rise to mystic literature were profoundly different from our own context and time. One should likewise be suspicious of the apparent continuity in discourse from their time to our time, as if the same movements in power and knowledge will also result in the same eventualities, and as if there are more or less the same phenomena that constitute both our age and theirs. As Foucault reminds us, this does not of course preclude the fact that there may be similarities in terms of the conditions that allow for the social shifts to occur. What we have to be mindful of, however, is that these shifts "are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized."[71] Nevertheless, we already find within mystic literature the possibility of "learning from them." For de Certeau, "[mystic utterance] says nothing. It permits saying. For that reason, it is a true 'beginning.' It is a liberating space, where yesterday's readers—but 'we' also—can find speech."[72] The hermeneutic key that allows for our appropriation—despite the clear and irreconcilable gulf which history sets up between those mystics and us—is their *very inclusion within tradition through language*, which is none other than the articulation of the *personal* encounter with God that lies at the heart of Christian revelation—an encounter with a person. The vocative "we" that mystics use is meant not only for their immediate listeners; it is also directed to the members of the *ecclesia*, the people of God. Thus, de Certeau quotes Surin in the prologue of *La Science Experimentale*:

> It is in the same spirit and with the same intent that these things that we have known through an adventure we have had during our century, and in which God's providence engaged us, are used in this discourse

[71]Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 25.

[72]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 99.

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> to affirm the faith we are engaged to profess by the Catholic religion, and to make us better Christians. All those to whom we speak in this book have an interest in these things. For them I would like to perform a service for eternity.[73]

Here it is not Surin that speaks of this eternal performativity but the Eternal Word. The textual tactics of the double-reference of the *I* allow for this plurification and multiplication of the same discursive practice. This is not to say that the discursive tactic transforms mystic utterance into a universilizable discourse; on the contrary, it can only be understood within its proper context, and we have shown this above. That is to say, mystic utterance can only be understood *in the context of a loss*, and it is in this loss that an eternity can be performed: an indwelling in the "ceaseless present" made possible by the irruption of the Other which forever eludes one's calculation and rationalization.

And do we not have this in our secular age, when the plurification of the idea of human flourishing produces endless avenues for human agency to capitalize on? Against this anthropocentric tendency, a path is paved by mystic utterance, for it is only with the Other that one can "begin anew" by ceaselessly dwelling in one's time, despite the gradual dissolution of the institutions of meaning:

> One more thing, perhaps, is mystical: the establishment of a space where change serves as a foundation and saying loss is an other beginning. Because it is always *less* than what *comes* through it and allows a genesis, the mystic [poem] is connected to the *nothing* that opens the future, the time *to come*, and, more precisely, to that single work, "Yahweh," which forever makes possible the self-naming of that which induces departure.[74]

Mystic writing, in the final analysis, bears the weight of a broken tradition while at the same time maintaining a hope "to the Other" which makes "everything new" (Rev. 21:5). The fragmentation of society must not be taken as a negative moment, as the mystics

[73]De Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 180.

[74]De Certeau, "Mystic Speech," 100.

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considered their time to be positive spaces for the irruption of the Divine:

> Blast the marginalized fragments of the past alive with the memory of suffering and hope; remove them from their seemingly coherent place in the grand narratives we have imposed upon them. Learn to live joyfully, not despairingly, with and in the great fragments we do indeed possess.[75]

With these "mystic signposts," we then ask: what is to be done in the waste land of the secular age? As long as we understand "doing" in terms of the robust human agent capable of being the author of his or her own actions, we are reverting back to the illusion of totalization and control, the grand narrativization of the totality of experience. Against this totalizing tendency one says with the mystics: to "live without a why." Meister Eckhart, as we have seen earlier, animates most of the subsequent mystic literature[76] precisely with this point:

> All things that are in time have a why. Thus when someone asks a man: "Why are you eating?"—"In order to gain strength."—"Why are you sleeping?"—"For the same reason." And so everything that is in time. But if someone asked a good man: "Why do you love God?"—"I do not know, because of God." …"Why are you living?"—"My word, I do not know! But I am happy to be alive."[77]

We can then read mystic literature against the backdrop of our time *as a mode of subversion* in our own attempts at totalizing from the

[75]David Tracy, "Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of our Times," in John D. Caputo & Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 179.

[76]I qualify with "most" since some mystics, specifically the Spanish mystics of the 16th century, did not have any access to Eckhart's works, and it is only towards the end of the 16th century that Eckhart's sermons were spread throughout the Iberian peninsula. Nevertheless, it is equally striking how Eckhart and St. John, among others, share similar forms of mystical language.

[77]Meister Eckhart, "Woman, the Hour is Coming," in *Wandering Joy: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Philosophy*, trans. & comm. Reiner Schürmann, foreword by David Appelbaum (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 2001), 54.

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standpoint of the robust human agent. Mystic utterance teaches us of the eventual failure of teleology in trying to achieve the "full human life" because it is only with and through the Other that one is taken up to the "mystical island."

While Taylor's model allows for plurality to abound from the point of view of the morally-constituted agent, the mystics teach us that human flourishing does not lie in the agency of the human person amidst the choices that are presented to him/her. Far from being a teleocratic principle of fullness[78] where the immanent is fully reconciled with the transcendent, the mystics clear out a space where the transcendent does not cease to irrupt. It is in this never-ending process of purgation and breakthrough—and here we see traces of the Dionysian mystical process—that a new beginning can finally be mapped out: not for the sake of some utopic future, but always a "kingdom that is here, but not yet." To be sure, one cannot just reject Taylor's sketch of the secular age, for it does hold some credence. What is essential here, however, is the genesis of the moment of choice that characterizes the varieties of human flourishing: the "condition of the possibility" of choice no longer lies in the agent. It is rather, as the prophets of Israel tell us, to be "called" and chosen in the midst of the world. The critical moment, then, is to *choose* to dwell in the decadence of our time, as the mystics did, for it is only in this dwelling that the heterological possibilities produce endless narrativity. It is not a matter of choosing what fits best for one's aspirations and desires, as is suggested by the pluralities of human flourishing; it is, rather, a matter of choosing to "let be"—what Eckhart has called *Gelassenheit*—and let the Other take up oneself. To assent to mystical utterance and to "follow them," in the final analysis, is to be led beyond the limits of technological and rational phenomenality, and onto the possibility of being founded upon by the Other: "the modern system of the calculating, technological subject opens a space that ultimately eludes

[78]Here we still discern traces of Taylor's Hegelianism in his attempt to reconcile plurality to form a totality.

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the subject's planning and calculation because it eludes the subject's power and representation."[79]

V. Conclusion

We provided a response to Taylor's challenge to enlarge our palettes for the transcendent by taking inspiration from the mystic writing of the 16th and 17th centuries. With the aid of de Certeau's discursive analysis, we pointed out two elements in mystic utterance—excess and exile—that showed both 1) their context of loss and degradation but also 2) an establishment of a space where an encounter with the Divine reorders the economies of knowledge and faith. The subversive techniques of mystic utterance open up their discourse to endless narrativity, which in turn allows us to understand mystic utterance in our context. We ended with the possibility of opening up to an "Other" discourse as a possible path which the mystics clear out for us in our secular age.

The contemporary times can thus be said to be a *critical* moment in the history of thought not only in terms of how important it is to respond to our present predicament but, more importantly, in terms of being a space for *choice* that may lie outside the purview of human agency. We can thus end this essay most fittingly with David Tracy:

> It is crucial, I believe, that the two forms of awareness represented in secular thought by philosophy and tragedy are also present in Western religious thought. On the one hand, one finds a meditative and contemplative awareness that, when intensified, is well described as mystical. … On the other hand, one finds a prophetic awareness focused on evil injustice and suffering that, when intensified, becomes apocalyptic: when prophesy fails, apocalyptic takes over.[80]

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[79]Thomas A. Carlson, "Locating the Mystical Subject," in Michael Kessler & Christian Sheppard, eds., *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, trans. Gareth Gollrad (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 225.

[80]David Tracy, "Afterword: A Reflection on Mystics: Presence and Aporia," in Michael Kessler & Christian Sheppard, eds., *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, trans. Gareth Gollrad (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 241.

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