

CELEBRATIONS IN EXILE

Arthur Kroker

... the moments at which we thus grasp ourselves are rare, and that is just why we are rarely free. The greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects into homogeneous space. Hence our life enfolds in space rather than in time; we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we "are acted" rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration.

Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*

It is as though we all preferred to die to preserve our shadow.

R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*

Michael A. Weinstein, *Meaning and Appreciation: Time and Modern Political Life*, West Lafayette, Indiana: The Purdue University Press, 1978; and *The Tragic Sense of Political Life*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977.

It is ironic that in this, the most publicized of histories, an era in which reflection passes effortlessly into the sociological currency of destiny, that the most creative of theoretical tendencies should choose to abandon the public

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situation, to extricate itself from the spatial representations of the social self and of the "conventional ego" in order to exile intellectuality to a sometimes quixotic, always indeterminate, exploration of the depth levels of the intuited self.

As with any innovative theoretical tendency, this self-expulsion of thought from the nominally "public" sphere — the inversion of the direction *and* object of reflection — is less an exercise in political quietism or disinterested social inquiry than a radical recovery, a recapturing through intuition of the extraordinary dimensions of "concrete durational being" in its relations with the constitutive processes of human experience.

With the publication of *The Tragic Sense of Political Life* and *Meaning and Appreciation*, Michael Weinstein signals his intention, an intention which I suspect is but a premonition of a coming shift in the focus of theoretical studies, to press the philosophical imagination to the limits of its expression in developing anew the tradition of intuitive phenomenology. In its radical denial of the efficacy of reason in the midst of the "exclusivities" of political life and of the validity for "durational being" of the Cartesian thinking ego as the informing impulse of the logic and space of modernity, this intuitive phenomenology foreshadows an attempt to situate the viewpoint of the "fundamental self" as the focus, first for political theory and then for a "recovered" human situation.

The significance of this project is that it is unequivocally an act of final rebellion: a rebellion not simply against the *contents* of that accidentality, History, and the passing parade of its partial ideological representations but as well against the *forms* of History — the abstract institutional space of modern culture, the estrangement of thought typified by the "spatialization of cognition", and the eruption of the "extensive" public ego from the expressive self. In Weinstein's perspective, literary existentialism, the "existentialism before the letter" of Dostoevsky and Kazantzakis, and philosophical existentialism, or more elegantly the "finalist" perspectives of Unamuno, Bergson, Stirner and Kierkegaard, are combined into an eloquent political synthesis. An "agonic" perspective is marshalled against the ultimate facticity of the traditions of relativism and formalism; the life of appreciation is opposed to the "practical" viewpoint; the intensive, qualitative and heterogeneous character of the "time of duration" is alienated on the side of emancipation from the "abstracted" concept of historical space; and, finally, with Bergson, the possibility of "concrete durational being" is contrasted with the actuality of the "conventional self" living in historical time. What occurs, in short, is a celebration of the self in exile: a celebration of the possibility of denying, in thought and in action, the extensiveness of History by erecting in the solitude of "expressive" experience a life philosophy capable of redeeming

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the “recaptured” conventional self and of satisfying the human hunger for expiation, understanding and immortality.

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With Weinstein, how can we not but remain silent in the face of the nihilism of modern culture, the almost fetishistic sense of tragedy exhibited in political and social life? It is with mute astonishment and a frustrating incapacity to summarize, at first from feelings into images and then into words, that I stand before the shadow-like quality of the public situation: representations without duration, spatializations without content, institutions without constitution. Is it not the mark of our existence that the absolute singularity of the individual, the constitutive foundation of the life of expression, has been revoked and in its place the projects — the prophetic intuitions, feelings, habits and attitudes — of “durational beings” forced into relativity with the surrealism of mass organizations? ‘I’ becomes the ‘they’ of the conventional ego, my death becomes the victory of their forgetfulness, my being is evacuated with the precision that could only be possessed by institutions of “instrumental activism”. My aspirations, and most of all, my failures are spread out for purposes of collective exhibition and, indeed, shame by a sterile reality that squanders the sacredness of the human and the natural.

Weinstein is correct in this regard: the crisis of the twentieth century is experienced most acutely as a generalized depreciation of the possibility of “meaning”; and the sources of this crisis of meaning are embedded so deeply within the logic of History as to require for their resolution, for the revelation to ourselves of the *reality* of the intuited viewpoint and of the *unreality* of the spatializations of historical time, a radical rupturing of the “veil of consciousness”.

For us, the heirs of a decayed culture, the legacy anticipated by the “methodical doubt” of Descartes and by the political doubt, the fearful externalizations of Hobbes, is the collapse not only of satisfactory systems of transpersonal meaning — the scission of the modern from medieval space and time — but also, in its wake, the collapse of “cultural time perspectives” and the tragic debilitation of the quest for comprehensive political meanings in the twentieth century. “The Cartesian predicament may be defined as the absence of a stable and certain transpersonal meaning through which human beings can integrate themselves into the public situation.¹ Furthermore, for Hobbes, “The state of nature is not a counter-factual idealization, but an accurate description of the structure of modern politics, just as Cartesian provisional doubt is not a method, but a precise rendition of the level to which con-

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sciousness continually falls in modern times."² That the march to "the dead-end of the minimum structure of experience" — the search for a comprehensive synthesis of cultural time and transpersonal meaning — in the midst of the "exclusivities of action" has failed to evade the prophecies of Descartes and Hobbes is witnessed by the present wreckage of the two "master" traditions of contemporary political thought: relativism and formalism.

Relativism, the general doctrine that understanding is principled by the structure of cognition, that reason is dependent on the form, then content, of experience, originates with Hegel's transfer of reason "from the thinking individual, where it had been lodged since the Cartesian experiment, to history." In evading the abstract tensions of "subjectivism" of the "unhappy consciousness" — the antinomies of "matter and spirit, passion and reason, practice and theory" — Hegel contributes a vision of cultural time, the specifics of which, Weinstein argues, are less important than "the general notion that transpersonal meaning is found through a relation between the individual and his historical circumstance." This "abstraction" of the individual into the externalities of History, of thought into a phenomenology of estrangement, reaches maturity in the nineteenth century with the development of "images of the public situation" principled by the coordination of scientific naturalism and political sociology. In practice, voluntaristic, and as science, deterministic, the images of the public situation immanent to positivism and historical materialism, and later to structural-functionalism, "unify cultural time by offering a vision of history that is necessary rather than contingent." The tragedy of relativism, in its journey from Hegel through Marx to the "inter-perspectival" debates of the modern century, is that in its forced yielding of the grounds of cognition from the aesthetic to the material, of History from spirit to function, is that it issues in the savagery of jurisdictional debates among an irreconcilable range of mutually exclusive historical meanings. Under the auspices of the sociology of knowledge, reason is reduced to the vacancy of power; and negation becomes but a "defensive posture" around, in principle, indefensible syntheses of cultural time and historical determination. In the relativistic perspective, the under-determination of the heterogeneity of the forms of History is accompanied by the over-determination of the exclusivity of its contents.

So, too, with the general doctrine of formalism, "Conceived as an attempt to make the uncertainty about transpersonal meaning and the search for it substitute for any particular substantive meanings, the formalist response to the problem of relativism ranges from Royce's 'loyalty to loyalty', James's 'will to believe', Camus' absurd revolt, to Ortega's, Mannheim's and Sartre's notions of authenticity . . .".³ The decisive shift in formalist philosophy from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, and here Weinstein notes the parallelism of the thought of Alejandro Korn and Josiah Royce, lies in its

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internal transformation from a philosophy of "mediation" to a philosophy of "immediacy". "Philosophies of mediation employ conceptual structures as bridges between some basic human experience and a realm of being beyond present experience."⁴ An elegant description of the evolutionary idealism of Royce's thought: in Royce's terms the tension of reason derives from its uneasy vacillation between the "acknowledgement" of the existence of an absolute — a metaempirical realm — and the present of "limited and alienated experience." On the other hand, philosophies of mediation ". . . employ conceptual structures as bridges between finite human experiences."⁵ Consider the thought of Korn: an irreducible commitment to the exploration of that " 'polarized activity', consciousness, 'in which the I and its opposite are reciprocal functions.' " History, however, is uncompromising in its extensiveness and homogeneity; and formalism collapses into a radically absurd effort, at synthesizing, in an increasingly "specious" present, the uncertainty of transpersonal meaning and the inward journey of the intuited self.

A digression to self: My desires, my will, hunger for the continued vitality of formalist philosophy, whether of mediation or immediacy. What intellectual journey has been taken to the interiority of the tensions of self and ego, of intuition and behaviour, of serene contemplation and political fury, that has not inspired a renunciation of the solitude of psychological exile for the familiar homeland of History? Who, in active consciousness of Ortega's philosophical presentiments of the indispensability of human singularity in the presence of death and of Camus' eloquent rebellion in and against absurdity, would not abrogate the life of expression in favour of "normal psychological space" — to "walk on the wild side" of spatialized cognition and, of its counter-part, the politics and sociality of mutual advantage and mutual fear — if, and only if, formalism could fulfil its promise of providing, not meaning, but a minimum structure of authentic practice in a world of absurdity?

Formalism, however, fails. Camus' absurd — "the will to unity and the lack of response" — is an irrelevancy to a History without amnesty. Royce's idealism vacillates without expiation between the absolute and the intuitions of consciousness: unwilling to abandon itself to the completion of meaning at the sacrifice of immediacy; and incapable of resolving itself into the constitutive processes of alienated experience without, simultaneously, recovering "acknowledgements" of the absolute in uncertainty. The bitterness of secular abandonment, witness Sartre's injection into historical time through Marxism; and the quixotic futility of faith squandered in the defence of over-determined forms of uncertainty, heed Korn's apology of "intellectual probity". The denouement is predictable: twentieth century formalism, having discounted the possibility of historical time, and with it, faith in transpersonal meaning, has returned "to the Cartesian situation with the difference

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that what is certain is no longer the thinking ego, but present experience constituted by subjective internal meaning, objective external meaning, and their synthesis in action."⁶ It is the perfect fissure for the injection of the nihilistic tendencies of modern culture into the last defence of the life of reason. Probity stands against virtue, and action against knowledge. The ideal of creative freedom, now in its final contortions, explodes onto the public situation under the sovereignty of the "vital lie"; or implodes onto an increasingly "specious" present — a present without memory or possibility; a carnival of probity without will, and virtue without significance.

The life of expression finds no solace in the sphere of existence. The dethronement of reason, the disjunction of reflection and History, has not conspired to effect an inversion of practical life — to compel the world into relativity with the projects of concrete durational being, but how could it be otherwise? The vacuum left by the collapse of "transpersonal meanings" and by the disunification of "perspectives on cultural time" has been rapidly filled with mass organizations, the essential structures of which organize increasingly "accidental" publics into mechanical, but coherent, contexts of historical meaning. The quest for meaning thus passes from the contradictions of philosophy into the sphere of sociology and, thereupon, into the sullen pathos of administered society, into the abstract authoritarianism of institutional space. It is as if in the fallen plenitude of philosophical relativisms and in the temporizings of Ortega, Korn and Royce, our future memories had already been screened. Our fate now is to be condemned to a History that is as predictable in its senescence as it is demeaning in its brutalism, but this time, in political life as opposed to the life of reflection, without grace or elegance, without the civility of a decayed idea that falls with the announcement of its contradictions.

At this juncture, however, with the eruption of the contradictions of philosophy into the public space, I depart from Weinstein, although in a curiously ambivalent way. The lesson that I take from the last temptation of reason, the impossibility of publicizing concrete durational being through that estranged medium, meaning, is loss of faith in the civilising habits of reason and in its regulative ideal — the appreciation of a heteronomy of political experiences. For Weinstein, the tragic sense of political life inheres in the impossibility, the *constitutive* impossibility, of particularizing reflection or limiting will to any one of a plenitude of mutually exclusive, but internally intelligible, political perspectives. This is against the background of a public situation, the autocratic character of which apparently demands for its amelioration the sacrifice of the fundamental self to political activity and the imprisonment of reflection and feelings within those asylums of estranged mentalities, ideologies. Guided by the appreciative ideal, reflection hovers in pathos around a History indifferent to its anguish: History the logic of which

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implicates reflection within the paradox of acting publicly only at the expense of probity and not-acting to the detriment of authenticity. Pure politics and pure reflection; and both choices are ultimately irrelevant to the inevitability of the chain of historical determinations — the actual condition of injustice with probity.⁷

Authenticity, probity, the illusion that the life of reflection can “turn” History within the structures of its own logic: these are but epigrams to the vanity of a fallen consciousness; defensive outposts of a dispirited intellectuality in a History of no hope. The value of appreciation, the vacillation between the demands of reason and the public situation, cannot be said to be a radical gesture: it is, instead, uncontrite consciousness caught up in the act of gutting itself and, thereby, squandering the possibility of a redeemed humanity in a heroic but hapless gesture of sacrifice. The contradiction and tragedy of the appreciative experience derives less from reason’s injection into History, that is the obvious peril, than from the passive enslavement to History, the negative necessity, implied by the act of not-acting to maintain probity; by being, without the justification of contingency, the last survivor of a broken phenomenology.

In place of appreciation, the coordinative principle of the life of reflection, I would invoke as the ideal of the life of expression the bitterness of living in a public situation that is never one’s own — the salutary despair at finding no exit for the fundamental self into History. The tragic sense of political life is not impossibility of accomodating the “agonic doubt” of the Pascalian within History; but that the tension of the agonic and the Historical, and, thus, the accomodation of the self in exile *within* the logic of the public space, should continue to be legitimated and taken as problematical by a philosophical tendency that has yet to confront the revolutionary character of its intuitions. In a politics of no hope, a pure politics of pathological power, the agonic must be cured of its illusions by being cured of History. For just as the self cannot be saved in History, so too History should not be redeemed at the expense of the inward journey of human expression. Bitterness, the motif of a humanity without hope, is also the instructor of a humanity without illusions. Bitterness, that primal intuition of man’s fate, forces into the vanity of consciousness the elemental insight that for the “man of flesh and bone” it is constitutively intolerable for the exploration of the “depth levels of the intuited self” — the one possibility extant for the eventual recovery of the human spirit — to be held ransom further to probity and injustice, the hostages of historical time. A radical scission of political obligations and emotional impulses, of “spatialized cognition” and “durational time” is, indeed, warranted. Confronted by the unhappy tension of the “vital lie” and inert reason, the life of expression must surely be de-implicated from the *logic* of a culture that is as debasing of its negative moment, of its critical

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oppositions, as it is of its apologists and practioners.

The intuitions of the embittered self visit the nullity of History: what emerges is, at last, "an inversion of the practical viewpoint"; the relativization of the processes of reflection, will, and the beautiful as dialectical moments in the recovery of the constitutive foundations of human experience, the social processes of human expression. Once divided from the extensive spatializations of the social self and from the mechanical representations of the "conventional ego", the fundamental self discovers in the anarchy of intuition, in the inward journey of the publicly injured individual, the "person" of intension and duration — the prophetic, and for now private, person of and for time.

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It is in the analysis of this suppressed, "extraordinary" dimension of human experience — the sphere of the intuited self and of its relation to Bergson's concept of "pure duration" — that Weinstein is most insightful. While I would contend that Weinstein's commitment to the ideal of "appreciation" ultimately begs the question of the relationship of intuition and politics, of the *political* significance of the collapse of relativism and formalism, I am convinced of the productive and fruitful character of the theoretical analysis opened up by his re-interpretation of Bergson's metaphysics. ". . . [O]nly Henri Bergson undertook a full-fledged philosophical critique of meaning by associating it with spatialized cognition and contrasting it with the intuition of pure duration, which reveals a process of expression that is creative of meaning. Bergson's . . . work announced a philosophical revolution that would have made practice relative to the processes disclosed by intuition."⁸ Furthermore, "Bergson's contribution was not his particular metaphysical attempt to bind a fractured experience together, which simply added to the 'explosion of meaning' but his intuition of the depth levels of the self that are the very generators of meaning and his suggestion that these levels are not usually accessible because of the requirements of social life."⁹ Against Bergson's "metaphysical" intentions in *Time and Free Will*, although not in *Creative Evolution*, the possible social significance of the "intuition of pure duration" cannot be under-estimated. The intuition of duration, the "unnatural act" of inverting the "practical viewpoint" to reveal the immediate, dynamic, heterogeneous, and qualitative aspects of human experience, is the epistemological instrumentality of surplus-will, "negative aesthetics", and "surplus-consciousness"; in short, it is the epistemological point-of-disclosure of those silent, but directly experienced, social possibilities that comprise the basis for an eventual return of the emancipatory impulse to the public

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situation. In preparation for this moment of return, if only as a provisional moment, the intuition of duration provides a method of exploring, through a recovery of awareness of the "fundamental self", the relationship of the social process of expression to reflection, will, and the desirable. If not thereby provoking a gradual change in human sentiments, a silent aggregation of prophetic intuitions ready to explode onto the public situation, this removal of the "veil" between consciousness and durational being provides, at the minimum, an understanding of the human possibilities denied to us by the accidental quality, if not by the social necessity, of existence. In an era noteworthy for confusing eternity with transitory actualities, the reclamation of the sphere of social possibility through the intuition of duration is not an insignificant political act.

As to how the social character of the intuition of duration could be made intelligible, Weinstein is explicit: "Bergson's original intuition was not of duration only, but of an entire self process, the form of which is a way of temporalizing, but the content of which is expressing the contents of consciousness unimpeded by the restrictions imposed by social conventions. Opposed to the self process of expression is that of reflection, which is constituted by the objectification of the self in homogeneous time. The interplay between expression and reflection is what is meant by human existence, which takes different attitudes in accordance with the relations between the two processes of temporalizing and experience."¹⁰ The "polemical" intermediation of reflection and expression — the former "selective and centrifugal", the latter "receptive and centripetal" — dissolves into a unitary dialectical moment the "warring tendencies" identified by Bergson as constitutive of human experience: extensive, homogeneous space — the place of reflection; and intensive, heterogeneous time — the situation of expression. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson notes these "warring tendencies": "The intuition of a homogeneous medium, an intuition peculiar to man, enables us to externalize our concepts in relation to one another, reveals to us the objectivity of things, and thus, in two ways, on the one hand by getting everything ready for language, and on the other by showing us an external world, quite distinct from ourselves, . . . prepares the way for social life. Over against this homogeneous space we have put the self as perceived by an attentive consciousness, a living self, whose states, at once undistinguished and unstable, cannot be separated without changing their nature, and cannot receive a fixed form or be expressed in words without becoming public property".¹¹ Weinstein adheres to Bergson's conception of the contradictions of freedom and social life, of History and durational being; with this single, important difference: the process of self expression represents a scission from the division, made familiar in modern times, of subject-project and their extensive synthesis in homogeneous space. In its place, Weinstein, first

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refusing the temptation of projecting a theory of historical meaning under the auspices of Bergson's "vital impetus", seeks to recover durational being by forcing reflection back upon its *constitutive* foundation in expression for the generation of meaning. Bergson has warned that in the absence of an "inner life", of a process of self expression, "our psychic states separating them from each other, will get solidified; between our ideas, thus crystallized, and our external movements we shall witness permanent associations being formed; and little by little, as our consciousness thus imitates the process by which nervous matter procures reflex action, automatism will cover over freedom".¹² It is in response to the debilitation of inner life — the tragic process in which expression is, at first, subordinated to and then displaced by the *forms* of reflection, forms which originated as representations of expression, of durational being — that Weinstein insists on remaining faithful to the "implosion of meaning" anticipated by Bergson. In preserving the vitality of prophetic intuition, the eruption through reason of charismatic emotion, Weinstein's vision of the "implosion of meaning" maintains the possibility of combining within the sphere of the intuited self the "totalizing" impulses of the expressive self and the "introspective" projections of reflection. The realm of the intuited self, of "concrete durational being", — a realm which is beyond and in opposition to the "ordinary experience of human action" and "normal psychological space" — is thus postulated as the basis for the recovery of social possibility, for the "inversion" of the requirements of social life.

Can the intuition of duration be related to the political sphere? If so, how is the *social* referent of "inner space and time" to be maintained in view of the tendency of "deep introspection" to "fall into time", to retreat to the silence of contemplation, then mysticism? Ultimately, is it possible for the durations of the life of expression to emerge from the depths of the archeology of the ontological impulse into the decay of History, to displace the "modular time frames" of conglomerate society with the variegated texture of lived experience?

Just as Weinstein remains silent in these works about the ultimate epistemological justification for the "polemical" basis of the social process of expression; he is hesitant, as well, to subscribe to a theoretical idiom that provides for the mediation of intuition and the public sphere at the expense of "organic solidarities" among radically dependent beings. While the intellectual probity represented by this limitation of perspective is consistent with Weinstein's claims on behalf of appreciation; this sacrifice of the possibility of mediation between intuition and the "social necessities" may be unnecessary, if not unwarranted. On a final note, I would suggest that if the self in exile — the intuited self in durational time — is not to fall into a vacant mysticism, two projects must be undertaken and, against the actualities of

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History, completed. First, intuitive phenomenology can do no better than to create cultural exits into an inner space and time which, in awareness of the singularity of the experience of death — the last principle of relativization, is kept “out of formation” with the social sphere; distanced from the secular spatializations of the public realm. Secondly, intuitive phenomenology must procure direct, “polemical” relations between expression and aesthetics. In the deeper recesses of durational time, our estranged emotions must constitute, in negativity, a vision of the beautiful. For it is this vision of the beautiful, validated by the prophetic intuitions of consciousness and supported by the torn fabric of human emotions, which will be ultimately our guide in the present human exile — a vision awaiting its “return”, awaiting in Bergson’s sense, the resurrection of Reality.

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Notes

1. Michael A. Weinstein, *Meaning and Appreciation*, p. 11. (cited hereafter as *Meaning*)
2. *Meaning*, p. 13.
3. *Meaning*, p. 26.
4. *Meaning*, p. 35.
5. *Meaning*, p. 35.
6. *Meaning*, pp. 38-39.
7. See particularly Chapter VII, *The Tragic Sense of Political Life*.
8. *Meaning*, p. 3.
9. *Meaning*, p. 53.
10. *Meaning*, p. 52.
11. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971, p. 236.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 237.