

Serghey Gherdjikov

Death Experience

Dreaming – Risking – Dying

English Contents and Abstract

© Serghey Gherdjikov

© Extrempress, 1994

Sofia, 1994

Abstract

This is a book about our way on this earth and this way's bounds. We are going the way of life and come to know it in the process. It is a one way path. Our days are counted. Everyone awaits his hour. Each instant life is running out.

Life on this earth is a unique event, unique experience and knowledge.

When dying we rise to the scale of our entire life. The touch of death throws light on what we do. Our doings acquire their true sense.

Death, as an ultimate bound, establishes the scale for any boundedness. We try to bypass the thought about the end. But when touched by death, our transient anxieties turn to cruel dilemmas.

When confronted with the incomprehensible event of dying, we are at our human bound. And then we can glimpse the answer of a forgotten question:

What is the nature of our human terrestrial life?

CONTENTS

1. At the boundary

I. DREAMING

2. Dream narratives

unknownness; flying; transcendence and death

3. The mysticism of dreams

dream-experience and dream-action; place-2; a way to the force

4. Oneirology

phase of dreaming; dream plot; interpreting dreams; critique

5. The experience of dreaming

mutual oblivion between waking and dreaming; non-semanticity; controlled dreaming; the world of dreams; dreaming and dying

II. RISKING

6. Narratives about risking

strike; passing; saving; enduring; ferocious arena; breakthrough; completing

7. The unfolding of risking

inclination; acceptance; warming up; under pressure; fear and joy (the shiver of birth); euphoria and exhaustion (the shiver of death)

8. Last struggle

forgetfulness; death advises; baring; harmony; a meeting of forces ; condensed life; fear and will; the experience of risking

III. DYING

9. Testimonies

outside the body; plot of dying; para-psychological explanation; change after return; after-effects and the importance of NDE

10. Mystic reflections

“the composite disintegrates” – dharmas and śūnyatā; mastering dying; mastering the world beyond; magic explanation

11. Thanatology

NDE-explanations; programmed adaptation; the arrow of time; limits of scientific explanation

12. The experience of dying

the world is running out; transformation; the boundary of the world

13. Human form

tonal and nagual; human form

Chapter 1. At the boundary

Man is a *finite* being. This is to say, he has his *bounds* in time and space. Man is *transient*. This is to say either that he is destructible, *flaring up* for a while in the night of nothingness, or that he *passes* through this world, coming from somewhere and going somewhere – fulfilling a “transition”.

A boundary delimits and thus defines our existence here and now. It lends it definiteness. We know who we are insofar as we know our bounds. And we can know them only if we have perceived them. This perception demands for boundary experience.

A breakthrough without. Being born is the radical breakthrough out into the world. What is born is bound to die. Dying is a new birth, if it is not destruction.

A breakthrough within. A symbol of the breakthrough within is dying.

Survival. Without keeping our wholeness we cannot surmount death for a single instant. This wholeness is flexible and bears injury, but only to a degree. *Wholeness is not warranted.*

Each breakthrough points to a boundary and thus it is a page from the book of life we ourselves are writing. Death is the boundary of all boundaries in man’s terrestrial life. Hence, it is the definition of all definitions of man. Man is mortal. The most important thing about terrestrial life is that it has an end. Could we succeed in understanding mortality, we would have understood our life as a whole.

According to the logic of this introduction, there must be at least three kinds of death experience: *experience at equilibrium*, *experience at breakthrough without* and *at breakthrough within*. I found those three kinds in the following human states:

dreaming (wandering or directing one’s steps in dreams);
risking one’s life (deliberate involvement in a life threat-

ening action);

dying (awareness of death approaching – suicidal attitude, expecting an execution, deadly illness, accident, clinical death).

Sleeping is an intermediate state between waking and death, which corresponds to resting wholeness. In resting wholeness *one doesn't know the boundary*. While sleeping one is not aware of mortality. But sleeping is the cessation of many human functions and of consciousness above all. Sleeping is oblivious. In this it most resembles death. Hypnos is Thanatos' brother.

But the experience of sleeping properly is *dreaming*. It is active experiencing. Here we abide in a phantasm, which is flowing or is being directed. The dimensions of dreams are alien to the dimensions of waking. Dreaming is boundary experience in many ways. It is as well delimited as are waking and dreamless sleep. This is visible even in the encephalogram. In science dreaming is singled out as a third state along with waking and sleeping.

Risking one's life. Acting in front of death is a way to experience one's boundary by surmounting death through ultimate effort. One chooses a life-threatening situation, from which there is a way out depending on the success of one's action. One gets engaged with the problem and either solves it or dies. The core *is the event of risking one's life together with the active effort to surmount the obstacle and to save one's life*.

Deadly risk offers not only a measuring rod, but also an immediate life on the verge – life with the full effort of the will, intellect, muscles and the whole range of boundary sensations: fear, euphoria, pain, joy.

Dying. I assume or, more exactly, I know, that an *experience of dying exists*. From a certain stage of dying (halted heart-beat and breathing, even straight line of the encephalogram) the return is possible (clinical death). But even in ab-

sence of such a travel one may for hours, days, months, even years, experience life running out. The latter is a “boundary situation”, exactly as deadly risk. One is not acting, but suffering.

The despair, horror and apathy of the deadly sick are known to us. The wild visions of the dying consciousness are a puzzle to psychology, medicine and philosophy. On the threshold of one’s death one may evaluate and make sense of his whole life, recognize its peaks and falls, purge oneself from illusions and see through truths about that life.

I want to show that both risking one’s life and dying (which may gradually pass one into another) are *ultimate forms of experience* and thus *ultimate knowledge*, which brings us closer to the truth of life than anything else on this earth. They are able to provide general orientation, to give a human being lasting determination, to draw the trajectory of her/his further life.

My study is essentially a phenomenological one. Phenomenology is here philosophy of ultimate experiences in the life process of man, on the borders of human knowledge.

I. DREAMING

Dream is the phase of life most often compared with death. Dreams are well delimited from the rest of experience, from “reality”. They are *trust-worthy* and indubitable as phenomena, despite of being very contestable in their status – imagination or reality, this- or other-wordliness, chaos or order, sense or nonsense.

Chapter 2. Dream narratives

Personal experience is important in the analysis of dreams. I select dream plots of my own. Only they are coherent with the analysis that follows: the dreaming and the “interpreting” person are one and the same. Here no “objective empirical results” are obtained, but there is continuity between dream experience and its interpretation.

unknownness

Dreams are strange, unintelligible. We find ourselves as if in an unknown world. Strange is their time, space, causality. Strange are the characters, occurring in them, and those character’s actions.

Space and time in this world have no definite coordinates. Awareness of a point of departure, of a center of the coordinate system is lacking: hence the feeling of roaming.

The common background of the dream plot is rather uncommon from a waking position. Some backgrounds are entirely unknown and even somehow unearthly. Those places and forms are coming as if *from elsewhere*, copying apparently known details.

flying

A specific emotional background is created by *flying in a dream*. It passes imperceptibly into finding oneself in an *un-*

known place, in a transcendent situation. Flying in dreams requires an *effort of will*. The effort is strongest while one *gets off the ground* or *rises* along a tree's trunk, a slope, a rock or summit.

Flying in dreams is jubilation clouded by the awareness of being thrown out of the common human world into a place you don't know and cannot control. Flying shows that *dreams are boundary experience leading beyond habitual life.*

transcendence and death

Here the plots of *exiting from this world* and *dying* are presented. Mystic attempts to explain dreams are numerous. But all of them are cognitively uncertain.

Science does what is possible and is constantly discovering new data about the mental and brain processes of dreaming. But dreaming is *unobservable and a dreaming person cannot bear evidence about it, in contrast to perception in a waking state.* Here epistemology is confronted with a challenge. *What is the nature of dreaming as a kind of experience? Do dreams provide us with knowledge about death?*

Chapter 3. The mysticism of dreams

Here I consider three forms of *mystic explanation* of dreams: Shri Aurobindo's "integral yoga", Robert Monroe's "travels with a second body" and the "magic explanation" of don Juan given in books of Carlos Castaneda. They also represent three different cultures.

a way to the force

"Dreaming is as serious as seeing or dying or any other thing in this awesome, mysterious world... – explains don Juan – A man hunting for power has almost no limits in his dreaming."

Dreaming is fulfilled in another ontological plane and is

an experience radically different from waking experience. Insofar dreaming is 'transcendent'. Dreaming is at the same time 'transcendental', it is a process of the same mind, which wakes and knows the world in a waking state. Its understanding cannot follow solely the scheme of "function" or "significance". Dreams are to be seen from the side don Juan is talking about. There we do 'a thing in itself' and there is no reason for them to 'serve' waking life.

Chapter 4. Oneirology

'Oneirology' means in translation from Greek 'science of dreams'. But in fact there is no such science. Here an area of research is concerned divided between physiology, psychology and psychiatry. Dreaming is defined in contemporary science as a second state of sleep or a *third state of existence*, along with sleeping and waking.

phase of dreaming

The third state is designated differently: REM sleep (REM – rapid eyes movements), rapid waves sleep (RWS), D-state (from 'de-synchronization'), 'dream' (Hartmann) – for it is then that dreams appear – '*paradoxical*' sleep (Jouvet); since when, in the REM phase, the encephalogram shows signs of waking it is extremely hard to awaken the sleeping person. I emphasize the adjective 'paradoxical'. The graph of the phases of sleep shows it to be paradoxical: *in a state of deep sleep a mental and brain activity 'explodes', which is comparable with that of waking*. This basic fact is a foundation for the understanding of dreaming as a 'third state of existence'.

Phenomenological analysis finds here intentionality on a third plane in life world or on a third plane of reality. In contrast to that 'rapid sleep' (REM), the former four phases will be designated as non-rapid waves sleep (NWS) or syn-

chronized sleep (S).

A range of encephalograms shows the change in brain activity during different phases of sleep as compared with waking.

Waking. The brain radiates *Alpha* waves – relaxed alertness – with frequency about 10 cycles per second, 30/50 μV :

Stage 1. Sleep approaching and light sleep. Alpha rhythm fading.

Stage 2. A light noise is still able to break sleep.

Stage 3. Transition to deep sleep. *Delta* waves with frequency 0.5-3 c/s.

Stage 4. Deep sleep. Slow waves with *delta* frequency 0.5-1 c/s. Only a strong external stimulus is able to change the EEG.

Paradoxical phase. Deep sleep is broken. Quick, sudden movements of the eyes. *The graph resembles that of waking (alpha).* Quick synchronous waves of low voltage. After phase 4 an entirely new kind of graph appears.

Here is a description of the phase of ‘paradoxical sleep’: “1. REM ... appear suddenly. The rapid phase lasts for 100-200 ms. Eye movements resemble the fixing movements of the eyes in waking and can be related to the dream visions.

2. When the latter accompany the REM also a sporadic activity of a whole group of little muscles is observed: contractions of the face, grimaces, but also contractions of the muscles of the larynx, of the fingers, the legs or the middle ear. Here too, according to our opinion, there is connection with dreaming.

3. Investigations of heart rhythm in a paradoxical period show now accelerated rhythm and now slowing down of rhythm depending on slow sleep ... In humans oscillations of the order of 40 to 100 beats per minute are observed. *They approach the ones observed in a waking man engaged in absorbing activity* (my italics – S. G.). In non-rapid sleep oscillations are only a few in a second ... The entire nervous sys-

tem is a field of vigorous activity. The temperature of the brain raises, the flow of blood to the spinal cord, as well as the consumption of oxygen is increased. All those changes are evidence of an *increased metabolism* ...

Therefore paradoxical sleep is simultaneously the deepest sleep, from which one is very hard to be awakened, and a state very close to waking. It is in a sense *waking or inner life* (my italics – S. G.).” (Monret, 1993, p. 27)

Hence, there are three different states (phases of human life process): waking, non-rapid sleep and rapid sleep (my italics – S. G.) controlled by different structures. The spine column and the bridge, both of them archaic parts of the brain, is responsible for the regulation of those three rhythms.¹²

dream plot

A dream is a flow of emotionally coloured images. This flow is a meaningful sequence or at least is reproducible as a plot.

The scientific study of the dream plot is a conundrum. *The dream plot is an unobservable object.* Only the encephalograms are observed. From them one may guess whether a person is dreaming, but the dream itself is not to be seen. The content of the dream is learnt afterwards from the narration of the dreaming person.

Dreams are experiences of a phenomenal flow and are authoritative for the dreaming person analogously to waking experience. Therefore dream experience is simultaneously and indiscernibly being-knowledge.

How does oneirological research acquire *scientific data* from the narrations of dreams? Dreams do not speak the language of observation. They are narrated and from the narration one judges about the plot. Dream narrations are fragmentary; in the course of narrating they are being completed and meaning is conferred spontaneously on them.

And, in general, there will be hardly any object of research in science, which is *so far removed from the standards of scientific rationality*, as are dreams.

Those epistemological difficulties are projected into an endless debate as to the trustworthiness, the order and classification of dreams. Dream theories and, particularly, physiological studies may progress and proliferate, but *dreams remain on a constant distance from objectivity and thus from the rationality of science*. R. Smith emphasizes the necessity of a *standardized dream report*. He is aware that the objectivity of oneirological research hinges on the acceptance of dream content as an *independent variable* (Smith, 1984).

In another article R. Smith (1986) points out that the study of dreams is full of methodological traps. One of them is the vagueness of dreams and the ambiguity of the variables of dream content. It is always an open question whether accounts and associations preserve authenticity. For at any of these levels interpretations and distortions of the dreaming person are possible.

S. Pulver (1987) raises specific epistemologically significant questions about the study of dreams: Is the patient's narration useful for the formulation of an interpretation if there are no formal connections between the elements of the dream? How can the manifested dream contribute to the understanding of the dream and the dreaming person? The basic problem here is of semantic nature. Pulver thinks that *the manifested dream has to be decoded directly*.

The dream content naturally depends on the contents of the dreaming person's psyche. This fact is used as an *explanatory matrix* for relating the *dream plot* to the plots of *waking life* or to *organic states* of the body. The death content of dreams is linked to depressions and suicidal ideas: S. Firth, J. Blouin, Natarayan, A. Blouin (1986).

This cursory account of contemporary dream studies shows the epistemic limits: unobeservability in principle, indefiniteness of dream narration as data, indefiniteness of the

scheme of ordering in the narration, indefiniteness of the direction of explanation: organic processes – external stimuli – waking – psychic pains – thoughts and feelings.

Objective data are data from brain research of the phases of sleep. It is known therefrom that *dreaming is a fundamental state of the psyche and body* and not a transient phenomenon in the midst of sleep. This fundamental state is *as active as waking*.

Dream narrations show that the content of dreams as emotions and thoughts is continuation of the content of waking. Although at another plane, here pains and joys, desires, thoughts and intentions are somehow a ‘natural’ continuation of our waking psychic life.

But as waking-sleeping-dreaming-sleeping-waking is a closed cycle, it is equally justified to describe our waking psychic life as a continuation of dreaming.

interpreting dreams

Fulfillment of desires in dreams. Sigmund Freud is the first among scientists to assume and ground the *meaningfulness of dreams, the fact that they are liable to interpretation* (Freud, 2001). Of course this explanation belongs to the tradition of Western scientific thinking: *a dream is something unreal, an illusory vision, in which are coded unsolved problems from the unconscious psychic reality*.

Dreams show that something tried to disturb sleep, and they allow us to understand the way this has been prevented. As a result the sleeping person has dreamt and can go on sleeping; the inner stimulus, which was asking for her attention, has been replaced by external experience, now worked through. Thus a dream is also a *projection*, external manifestation of the inner state. Freud explains flying in dreams by *erection*.

The theory that dreams fulfill desires suffers from at least two misapprehensions. *In dreams it very often happens that*

one desires although desire is not fulfilled. There is no reason to assume that desires exist only in waking. When awake we very often follow the desires from our dreams. In the case of flying, sexual excitement does not exclude jubilation and fear. It is dubitable that sex, which often appears in dreams, has to be symbolized. If this symbolism is unclear to the dreaming person's consciousness, if he is not aware, when awake, that flying has meant sexual desire, how then could one believe that symbolic erection has produced its effect on the unconscious level? If the sleeping man's erection is real and he simultaneously is flying in a dream *what is the use of the dream plot* then?

Physiology and psychology are looking for explanations of the dream plot entirely from the standpoint of the first, waking existence. Needs that have arisen in a waking state are 'symbolically satisfied' in dreaming and thus tension is reduced. But images and imagination can both satisfy and *excite sexually*. How can 'symbols', as are dreams according to Freud, being unclear on the level of consciousness, be clear on the unconscious level and bring about that satisfaction, which is characteristic of the imaginary objects of desires?

The semantics attributed to dreams localizes them in a conventional space similar to human culture (knowledge, language).

My position is that dreams are *processes having meaning in a plane of dreams* and thus in the psyche as a whole. This position would lead to the recognition of the *reality of 'the world of dreams'*, which seems to disturb the scientific outlook.

The strength of psychoanalytic explanation of dreams is that it finds *meaning in them*. Not that it finds in their content meaning, *which lies outside them*. Like breathing, pain and seeing, dreams do have meaning. It is a moment of the organic, goal-directed life.

Dreams reach *far beyond the bounds of that functionality*,

which is met with in perception. They reach also *beyond the bounds of brain functions and equilibrium as a whole*. By far not everything is a moment of a perfect organics. The life process is full of imperfection, it is permeated by pain. Dissolution and chaos permeate every moment man's boundary existence between life and death.

The origin of suffering, despite of Freud's assertions, is not in society's and culture's impeding of instinct. Suffering is due to the constant tension between the forces of life and the inexorably approaching death, and this is a natural condition. Joy is an immediate continuation of suffering when the forces of life triumph over death. Dreams are real life in another plane 'distanced' from waking in the same way as waves of radio-messages are 'distanced' from one another in virtue of the difference in frequency.

Between being in waking and in dreams there is an abyss. That abyss is dreamless sleep. In contrast to psychoanalysis my explanation has a direct view on the content of dreams. Dreaming is life, which is not a shadow or reflection (as part of the advocates of this type of explanation also think); it is continuation of waking exactly as waking is continuation of dreams and sleeping.

Here the sequence goes full circle and *it is no good talking about a primary and secondary plane*. Our life is impossible without active waking. We live by our senses, by perception, contemplation and action in this unique world of waking. Our life is impossible without our activity in dreaming because through it we recuperate our forces and allow the body and spirit to clear chaos from themselves. And at that point we find ourselves in the inscrutable world of dreams. They are continuation of psychic life and a form of unobservable bodily life beyond the threshold of the waking world; but this is life lived by ourselves.

The study of dreams, oneirology, is objective only as a study of human behavior – including dream narration as a

kind of linguistic behavior. The other vast area is the physiological study of the brain in dreaming.

Self-analysis of dreams is most trustworthy. One can learn to penetrate into the immediate meaning of dreams as an alternative and complementary life process.

Chapter 5. The experience of dreaming

Dreams are experiences. One knows them insofar as one is within them. Truth coincides with being, life – with consciousness, essence – with meaning and meaning – with understanding. Here I cannot distinguish epistemological problems – objectivity, knowledge, truth, sense experience, rationality – from ontological problems – being, life, life world. How can one discern the world from sense experience? How can one discern the dream's *being* from its *truth*?

mutual oblivion between waking and dreaming

The three phases of human life process or planes of reality are so arranged that between dreaming and waking dreamless sleep occurs. Sleep reminds of dying. Consciousness is submerged into forgetfulness. *When we wake up our dreams are fallen into oblivion. When a dream breaks out waking is fallen into oblivion.* When dreaming we sink in the dream and are not aware of waking life. We have forgotten that such a state exists. Our dream world has no boundaries (that holds for any world we are immersed in). When waking we find it very hard to remember dreams and our memory is very elusive.

In a dream images and clear emotions always emerge from a chaotic roaming and 'glittering' of perceptions and emotions. A dream is much less organized than waking life and this is evidence about the disparity of our body, particularly our brain, and our empirically oriented consciousness, on the one side, and the plane, in which dream plots are

played out, on the other. The world of dreams is 'less real' than the 'world of waking', even as a hallucination or state of intoxication as compared with conscious waking.

non-semanticity

Semantics presupposes relatedness of two levels, of two planes of reality: *sign* and *object*. The sign exists in order to denote. When the one level acquires its meaning from the other there is asymmetry.

Is a dream a kind of text? Does a dream signify anything? Does the dream plot symbolize a psychic content? If yes, why does psychic content (feeling, thought) resort to dreams to express itself? If not, why are dreams liable to interpretation and seem to talk about something outside themselves?

We can learn to dream consciously. In our childhood we have learnt to perceive consciously.

In dreams, in the thrill of risking and in the mystery of dying there is no distance between being and knowledge. Things are being *experienced*. Only immediate experience is a way to knowing them.

A dream existing only in and for the mind of a dreaming person *cannot be known otherwise than by dreaming it*. The thrill of risk cannot be known otherwise than in experiencing it. Dying is unique and is as well closed in the mind of the dying person. *All these forms of experience are kinds of disclosing of psychic contents, which do not come from without and cannot be observed*. They do not exist before our glance.

Where there is no distance between levels no designation and reading of meanings is possible. *If one wants to take dreams as they are there is no semantics in them*. Dreams do not designate. They merely are. They are a reality on their own. Breathing does not mean anything. It merely is. Laugh does not denote, it just rejoices. Play does not symbolize. It entertains.

The semantization of dreams springs from deep epistemic circumstances. If dreams are taken as a reality in itself, how does this reality relate to the waking world? What then is the sense of the distinction between truth and illusion, between reality and imagination? What is the sense of the common human understanding in waking that what happens in dreams is, for good or for evil, *only in dreams*?

There are illusions called reveries. There are illusions called tales. There are illusions called sagas, legends, myths. There are illusions called art. There are illusions called science. Each of those illusions has its meaning in the flow of life in its own plane and context.

After these reflections the confrontation of truth and illusion or reality-illusion seems to be overcome. Illusion is as distinct from truth and reality as ever: if I say I have a million dollars this does not amount to having them. If I am looking on the screen at a train rushing on me I do not startle. But in both cases an illusory text has a real meaning: a lie can be a profitable bluff and the cinematographic image arouses emotions.

Dreams can not only fulfil but also *be* desires, they can *arouse* desires, *incite* actions, *provide* knowledge about ourselves, they can *be our self-revelation*, and not symbolical, but direct one. Many of our actions in waking are stimulated and determined to a degree by dreams.

Could we, *while dreaming, evaluate the waking world*, about which almost no memory is left in our dream, a world now left beyond the abyss of forgetfulness, then dreams would look like indisputable reality. Waking up and waking would look like no more than shadows, precipitates, reflections, illusions. This reversal brings us closer to the understanding of dreaming and waking as two planes without hierarchical relationship between them. *Neither does dreaming serve waking nor does the contrary hold.*

Waking and dreaming are linked as projections of one and the same I. Waking and dreaming are linked as parallel

to one and the same body (let us here ignore the hypothetical second body). Through dreaming and waking one and the same biography runs.

Both dreaming can acquire semantics with respect to waking and waking can bear meaning for dreaming. But this mutual semantics is possible because secondary.

Nevertheless there is a *decisive and radical asymmetry between dreaming and waking*. One cannot eat oneself fill in dreams. One cannot make real love in dreams (at least to a degree). One cannot change one's body in a dream as in waking. On the other hand, one cannot fly in waking. One cannot move from one place to another just by the power of will. One cannot touch other worlds.

There are dreadful dreams and they obviously have no useful function for the body. In waking and dreaming alike, there is chaos, destruction, pain, suffering and death. Ill and good, the dreadful and the pleasant are two sides of life in waking and dreaming.

controlled dreaming

Control in dreams is an extremely important topic. One can learn to dream consciously and control dreams and not just participate in them.

In this respect dreaming is considered in *yoga* and *Buddhist culture*, as well as in *shamanism*. Shri Aurobindo's 'dream-action' to a high degree coincides with 'dreaming' in Carlos Castaneda's teaching of don Juan. In 'Bardo Thodol' and other Tibetan writings on dying a fundamental requirement is to keep awareness, control over the flow of experiences in the processes of dreaming and dying.

The control on dreams is penetration of will and consciousness into dreams and their strengthening, once they are there. Thus dreams acquire the solidity of action in waking. Without this control dreaming is unrulid flow. In the same way the world of a new-born human being is indefinite and

vague until consciousness masters it with the assistance of community.

The participation of consciousness and will in dreams is an exceptional perspective also from purely philosophical point of view because reflection on dream experience in the very moment of the experience can become a source of an entire new horizon for human life.

Insofar as we do not want to drop the threads of our life into chaos and rather want to live with clear and conscious vision we are after conscious dreaming.

the world of dreams

The psychic and the physiological belong to one single whole or, more exactly, the psychic enables the wholeness of the physiological.

A human being in her dream lives in another realm, in another plane or horizon, which, without putting a strict sense into the notion of 'world' can well be defined as 'a world beyond'.

Radio signals provide here a good analogy. They appear at certain frequencies amidst the electromagnetic noise. Dreams and waking experiences appear on the background of a chaotic, half-conscious flow. Life process stands out on the background of dissolution, of entropy.

Dreams are fluid events, broken up and falling into oblivion. They are shot through with emotion. When immersed in the dream we believe what is happening there; we do not put its reality in question.

It is pointless to ask whether this is objective reality or an illusory world. In the observation of a mechanic movement the question about absolute place, time and velocity is not to be put. It is no good asking about movement independently from a system of reference.

Except *experiencing* no other concept of 'real' is to be had. The difference between appearance in *waking* and in *dreams* cannot be described as a difference between reality

and illusion if it is thought about with awareness of its *relatedness to a local process/state*.

Fundamental peculiarities of dreaming as compared to the world of waking are: domination of the psychic over the physical, of desire over necessity, of feeling over the senses, of thought over matter. In dreams one *masters dreamt gravitation, one changes dreamt space and time*.

dreaming and dying

Dying is a fundamental dream plot. Freud assumes at a speculative level that the drive for death (Thanatos) is as fundamental as the drive for life (Eros). And if dreams fulfil desires it follows that death dreams *fulfil an illusory desire for death*. Karl Jung describes dying as a radical personal transformation and a fundamental event of life.

Dying resembles dreaming for everyone who has been dying and came back in time to live again. Visions at clinical death and in states close to death are exactly so broken, confused, many-layered, queer, inexplicable, groundless. Their space and time are exactly so uncoordinated. Similarly to dreams, one enters them after an unconscious state empty of memories or empty floating in the black.

II. RISKING

Amidst the oblivious blackness of sleep, dreaming goes on. Amidst the unknowable risk we are always exposed to we *embark on risking*. (In a similar way amidst the blackness of falling away from life the visions of dying burst out.) Dreaming and risking are forms of experience (similarly to dying). Unconscious immersion in sleep, risk and unconscious death is not experience.

Ultimate risking is an experience, in which death becomes *sensible*. Death may be sensed and not sensed. It may be very close and rush on us unexpectedly. Death is sensible in ultimate pain. Death is sensible in visible mortal danger.

Risking is a conscious act of *being drawn into and exiting* the encounter with death. *In mortal risking* we break through the horizon of our life world outwards. Then we meet death as a pain of surmounting. This is the *retaining of high risk for life and its reduction to zero by an effort*. Danger is surmounted, obstacles are overcome. Deadly risk is experienced *on the verge of its transition into dying*. A problem on the boundary of one's faculties is being solved. *This boundary is experienced and taken knowledge of through ultimate action*. Survival is effected through a shift of horizon. This being in the risk is shivering and intense, full with a feeling of life. *The delight of risky adventure is testimony of an adequate life*.

Chapter 6. Narratives about risking

The stories about ultimate adventures are a secondary product. Nobody can know risking without taking a risk. Artificial ideas about fearfulness and heroism are far from the truth. The alpine sketches presented here are not reports of achievements, but attempts to discern the modes of ultimate risking.

Chapter 7. The unfolding of risking

Risking has its modes, phases, *phenomenological structure*.

inclination

Inclination to take risks is an *attitude*. It is manifested or hidden, a matter of individuality, but, to my mind, everyone in the depth of his soul likes risking, as everyone likes fresh and strong life.

acceptance

The attitude leads one to a choice and acceptance of a risky action in struggle with fear. *The picture of risky adventure emerges, lives and solidifies*. In our thoughts and in dreams, e. g., we pass over a vertical wall. We dwell on all known and presumed obstacles.

warming up

The start is a struggle with inertness. You imagine yourself to be a fool torturing himself for nothing. *Breaking away* from this resistance demands a prolonged period of *warming up*. This breaking away *contains something from the pain of birth*. Warming up brings back the balance. The tension of breaking away is abolished. The joy from what follows is mixed with *concern* about danger. At the foot of the wall you feel again the *threat of death* and the thought of renunciation may creep in.

under pressure

Concentration is growing and at the point of ultimate risking is such that, would one in that instant cut off one of my fingers, I would stand up and act. After the first *stressing passage* a second one may follow. You may be breaking a

new tour and not knowing where above there is a place to stop for a while and take a breath.

Patience is the other face of pressure. You must, like Odysseus, *tie yourself to the mast of your reason* and wait, sometimes without falling asleep for days and nights, in unspeakable exhaustion.

fear and joy (the shiver of birth)

Success brings joy and fear is easily overcome. You feel like new-born. Birth is a symbol and emanation of *breakthrough*. *And breaking through the shell is the sense of risking*. One can survive without being drawn into danger of life. But survival, when one is still drawn in, often means a breakthrough *on the verge of dying*.

This is a phase, in which life hangs by a thread, but continues. A step forward has been made. The force of mind has managed to stop the avalanche of fear. Something new has been experienced and a new territory has got to be known, a new page in self-revelation. This is a portion of power over the chaotic forces of death. In this *the shiver of joy* lies.

The highest expression of this breakthrough is birth, which marks the beginning of every new life.

Joy intoxicates. It easily passes into euphoria. And euphoria immerses one into oblivion and reduces risking to *blind floating in risk*. On the other hand, ultimate concentration may be disturbed by a surprising obstacle. Then readiness dissolves and risking is reduced once more to *blind floating in risk*.

euphoria and exhaustion (the shiver of death)

Risking and dying are not separated by a boundary. Both define the boundary through the ultimate clash between life and death. Risking turns into dying when the balance leans towards death and death starts dominating. In the face of

hardship and even of death we imperceptibly *relax* if everything is going well.

When joy from easy or skilful climb prevails and dims our estimate of each step and grasp we are captives of euphoria. And euphoria is the shiver of death because in euphoria estimate vanishes.

Euphoria resembles intoxication. One loses control of oneself in a purely emotional reality. One sinks in oblivion about the real forces, from which the situation consists. His behaviour is no more mastered risking, but simply blind rushing on death.

This is the shiver of death and you die. Only chance and mobilization can save you. You must wrest out of euphoria in this way. Readiness has to return within the limits of stable concentration.

The shiver of death may come with *exhaustion*. Sometimes you feel you are finished, but you must go on – otherwise a fall will ensue or you will remain in the arms of the mountain. Then you find unsuspected forces or you just fall and die. *Exhaustion is a mental phenomenon*. It appears at the surprise from an unknown and insuperable obstacle.

Here is a bound. You then yield and lose or go ahead.

Chapter 8. Last struggle

forgetfulness

Danger may exist without being known too. A deaf man can be hit by a car from behind. We are all in the deaf man's situation. Life in anaesthesia or when one is carried by inertia is a pale semblance of life. Therefore here I exclude the unknown *risk*. Unknown risk is a blank place for consciousness. It has to be thrown light on or be removed. Anaesthesia, *self-oblivion*, ignorance, dread and weakness turn life into simple vegetating. Here there is no encounter of live

forces with death. Then death calls on out of nowhere as infarct, apoplexy, cancer, madness or despair.

The mask of blindness consists of my habits of everyday, which enmesh me in a web. Behind this mask is the I helplessly exposed to the powers of death. This I, while inebriated by vain appetites and delights, does not ask about anything of importance. It remembers about the mysteriousness and responsibility of life only when death appears to it. Then the face of death is cruel. Then life running out is felt.

The satisfaction of life's needs in a consumptive world does not bring people face to face with death and thus the shiver of life goes lost. Open life is 'hunting' – we do not rely on alms, but *go hunting for our instants in the face of death*. The hunter is a pray as well and therefore he is clearly aware of the situation of transience. In open life the hunter achieves maximum *inaccessibility*. For, while he lives openly against death, nothing else is important and nothing can overtake him.

baring

According to Walter Bonati in the glowing atmosphere of struggle, face to face with hardships, uncertainty and thousands of dangers, the mountain *mercilessly bares* the alpinist and shows him such as he actually is with respect to himself and to others, with all his virtues and flaws.

Those who undertake ultimate risk do not hesitate to reach the very verge of life, while being careful never to step beyond the limits of their capabilities (Bonati)⁷.

harmony

Reinhold Messner relates the experience of consecration into the harmony of an eternal summit. He is on Everest, alone, without oxygen. "All my fear had withdrawn. Again I experienced that sensation of flying, that feeling of unity with the world. I had twice reached the boundary of the

world; I had twice reached my own boundaries. Why bothering about the way back? An infinite quietness wrapped me and I felt dissolving into the universe in a kind of nirvana. I was at the apex of what I ever had dreamt of, felt, thought. I had to gather all my strength to be able to tear myself away from the summit.” (*Mein Weg*)

a meeting of forces

In deadly risking death is present as *intense expectation and thought, fear and breathless action* here, over the abyss, or here, in the embrace of snow; here, in the raging waters or here behind the turn of the way. In an ultimate situation of risk death is a near, immediate possibility.

In those instants, hours or nights one exhibits faculties he did not know and did not expect from himself. One widens the horizon he experienced to that point. One shifts one's boundary. In a laboratory one is not able to endure air rarified to the degree of 8.000 m above sea level.

Life in deadly risk is directly put in question not in virtue of the inevitable aging and end, but of external destructive forces. One can see what he is able to do or try. He then is drawn into ultimately strong action and authentic life. All that is living survives in an effort and this effort against dying is itself life. The civilized man is alienated from this process and longs for it.

condensed life

‘The struggle for survival’ is life in its most complete form. Such is the situation of life: to be drawn into the flow of unceasing efforts, with no clearness as to the final meaning, on a scale provided by inevitable death.

A predator and its prey are in this situation, but humans usually are not. Hence the profound need for adventure, which replaces the authentic situation.

Frequently people who took risks are asked why they assumed them. The answer is: for the sake of joy. But where does the joy of deadly risk come from? Risk is a value in itself as *coming into contact with death* and as *intense existence thanks to this contact*. In this sense it is *authenticity* for man. This sensory, thinking and willing contact with death and the battle for survival here and now produce a fullness of life. Man needs *the ultimate experience* to find the right scale and *true quality* of his existence. Real life is the effort to live and any passive and secure state is an irreversible loss of time.

Thus the sense of deadly risk we consciously embark upon is neither in the body itself nor in the wealth of sensuous pleasures – one may have them without that risk. *The sense is in ultimate existence on the palpable scale of death.*

fear and will

Will and fear are antagonistic forces in the situation of risking. Fear and will are somehow connected. Fear can paralyze will, but can also incite it. Lack of fear is inadequacy, unawareness of danger. But the domination of fear above all is deadly.

Fear releases energy. The enormous power of terror and the enormous repulsion produced by death can explain the incredibly forceful action beyond known limits.

This fear is a real deadly fear. This is the horror of *entirely incomprehensible falling through*. Not of nothingness (Heidegger), but of the unknownness of death. Not the indifference of the world, in which it slips (Heidegger), but the fixation on the relief of the world with all its details crucial for a right and overly difficult action to tear oneself away.

This reflection grasps the situation phenomenologically.

Risk is nothing else than life with its problemat�city, as it is prone to constant destruction.

Things acquire their meaning in our life through our measured finiteness and its clear acknowledgement. Only

because of having projected duration of life of 80 years I determine my age of 37 as maturity or an age of 9 as childhood. Only therefore do I speak of a decline of my life after 60.

Only because of being able to die every instant do I live so, as all living beings do: through and in the effort to survive and live forth. An imaginary immortality in the form, in which I exist, would deprive my existence of its quality and probably condemn me to deadly senselessness.

Dying is the only problem to be solved; it embraces all our problems. Death is the boundary that generates all other boundaries. And this is to say that life, adequate, true, essential life, is always an immediate overcoming, surmounting of death, getting out to the surface from an ocean of darkness, in which death immerses us.

Death is the negative side of all our positive thoughts. All that is lit up in our world is defined and delineated in virtue of *the living being distinguished from the dead*, life from death, 'light from darkness' (*Genesis*). After that the differences come: pleasant–unpleasant, healthy–ill, pleasure–pain, good–evil, truth–fallacy, sense–senselessness.

Our world with all its things, as they are for us, is there for the reason that it carries us past our death and against it and it survives when and insofar as we survive thanks to our human efforts in the face of death.

The nullity of man is not in his perishability, but in his unwillingness and fear to live on the bounds of his perishable wholeness. On these bounds the entire feeling of life resides.

Ultimate action in the face of death is a peak in human existence on this earth. Here you are purging yourself from the faces and masks of conventional social space. You part with your roles. Here lie is merely unconceivable and absurd. You cannot think of money and fame, of power and success. You cannot think even of love. You are 'freed from

biography', free from the I.

This is a 'phenomenological reduction of the I', the reverse of Husserl's reduction to the I.

Any action undertaken on the scale of death, in awareness that tomorrow it will be late and there is no time for stuff and nonsense, is a true, ultimate, essential action. It is like 'a last battle' of ours.

Everything acquires significance and meaning on the background of such a measure as is death. The anaesthesia of pleasant oblivion of death only pushes a little away the thought of the end making it crueler in its unexpectedness. *Human lives are unequal – the more risky a life, the more valuable it is.*

III. DYING

Dying is different from *death* (a resting state); it is a *process* of being befallen by death or *act* of moving into it. *In reality there is no 'death' as a thing.* In the same way *dreaming* is different from sleep; it is a *process* or *act* of experiencing a dream before our eyes. In the same way *risking* is not merely a risk; it is a *process* or *act* of being drawn into, dwelling in and emerging from risk. Dying, analogously to dreaming and risking, *can be mastered by will* and is for the most part a process illuminated by consciousness. Amidst the despair of dying one can pull oneself together and regain one's composure.

In the stories told by people who experienced states close to death *in the middle of floating in absolute blackness the image of death visions is put in motion.* When we know that we are soon bound to die from incurable illness we gradually learn to accept it. At first there is unbelief, then anger and finally resignation. These are the phases of dying according to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Raja yoga and Buddhism, in detail Tibetan Buddhism (Sogyal Rinpoche), hold

that dying, as a most responsible human action, can be taken awareness of and mastered.

Even taken awareness of, accepted and ‘tamed’, death remains unknown. In dying we do not have the initiative, as in risking.

Chapter 9. Testimonies

In Plato’s *Phaedo* a friend of Socrates tells about his encounter with the wise man in prison in the day of the execution – Socrates’ drinking the poison. He tells, among other things, the following:

“And the true philosophers, Simmias, are always occupied in the practice of dying, wherefore also to them least of all men is death terrible” Plato, *Phaedo*.

In the East and the West, in Antiquity, in the Middle Ages and Modernity there are narrations about dying (near-death experience – NDE). *The West’s visions of death in their historical unfolding are presented in the book of Philippe Aries “Man in Front of Death” (L’homme devant la mort)* ²

outside the body

Let me describe the strangest event of my life. This happened in hospital, after an operation and exhaustion.

... I felt my life running out.

A doctor and two nurses rushed on me. They seated me on a wooden chair passed by the people who were playing. They surrounded me and threw water over me. I was breathing with my last effort of will – profoundly and slowly. My consciousness sharpened and I strained my powers to come to myself. I felt terribly weak and broken apart and I asked them to bring me to my bed. I remember being seated in a wheelchair and driven in the room ...

Then I clearly heard: “Blood pressure twenty five” and “His blood pressure is practically zero”. I came to in an impetuous rambling in black emptiness. Some unknown force brought me forth into a place somewhere behind myself. It was like falling through in nothingness; like being sucked up into a vacuum. I perceived this fall (or rise) in a kind of wonderment and “obliviousness” (lack of grasp and reference point for the acknowledgment of time). That had nothing to do either with imperceptibly falling asleep or with the fainting fit, in which everything had vanished before the fatal phrase I overheard.

A strong chaotic noise was accompanying me. I dimly associated it with a murmur of voices, as if a panic “conversation” beside my bed about my “eluding them”. But the noise was inarticulate and I could not liken it to speech. It ran like an irresistible flow in absolute blackness.

What followed is stamped on my memory ineffaceably. A ‘pedestal’, ‘terrace’ or enormous bed with a lattice headboard. The whole arena is hanging in the black. It is lit up or, more exactly, emits white-yellowish light. Living light.

Beside the ‘columns’ or ‘lattice’ there are living beings. Invisible or, at least, invisible to me, they are talking to me with animation. I am asking something from them (my memory has not preserved those words). Stuck into my mind is the feeling of question and answer, of request and refusal. I am asking and begging, I get an answer – a negative one. Then light pours on me like touching, hearth-rending clearness. No fear, no pain. Only amazement and sweet sadness.

Soon I am in the light with all my being and I adore what is going on, without understanding it. And then in a kind of ‘timelessness’ or a very long instant odd and, nevertheless, very well known scenes are running in front of me. The vision is accompanied by incredibly strong feelings of incompleteness, incomprehension and need for continuation. Vision and feelings replace one another like the lines of a

moving spectrum, but they seem to compose and perform the symphony of my life ...

I have no memory of a return, but I feel I am lying in the bed. At least five people from the medical staff are standing around me. They are looking at me with concern and relief. I have felt a hit on the breast, and now a particularly zealous nurse is leaning on me asking: “How are you?”

Pretty well, I must confess. Never before in this hospital did I feel so fresh and full of power. Physically I am feeble indeed. But my mind is exceptionally clear and bright. I feel like waking up from a long, healthy sleep – something I haven’t felt for a month, not to speak about the last two weeks.

Then I decide, I shall attempt to find out what happened to me. I know, this is unique experience and I take it with some mysticism as an omen. Anyway, I have the will to understand and to live, clinging to this understanding.

plot of dying

The American physician and philosopher Dr. Raymond Moody has gained world renown for his research over the states near to death published in his three books: *Life After Life*, 1975, *Reflections on Life After Life* and *The Light Beyond*, 1988. Moody is the first to describe methodically the phases of near to death experience. He also introduced the concept of ‘*Core Experience*’ (NDE) to denote the basic plot.

Kenneth Ring’s research confirms the basic conclusions of Moody on exiting one’s body, on light, noise and the evaluation of life. It is normal that larger part of the inquired persons have gone through the first phases of death experience and smaller part – through the last ones. Their stories form a coherent pattern, which can be called ‘*basic thanatomimetic narrative*’.

The interviewees of Kenneth Ring are unanimous that the experience is not a dream and *does not resemble a dream*. In the moment of death hardly any living person could enjoy

the profound relaxation needed for sleep.

The body, space and time ‘vanish’ or are radically transformed. There is a double consciousness of two parallel planes: the ‘physical scene’ of reanimation by the medical team and ‘the other reality’ of light and the presence of relatives.

para-psychological explanation

Kenneth Ring proposes a *para-psychological-holographic explanation* of the NDE phenomenon. He regards para-psychological explanation as a constrained departure from (conventional) science. It has a range of limitations that distance it from science.

Experience does go on outside the body. When death is approaching the separation from ‘something’ – from the physical body – is real. What separates itself moves ‘from darkness to light’ and perceives phenomena beyond the spatio-temporal coordinates of common perceptible reality.

The most remarkable effect is *autoscopy* – one sees his body from the side. According to Tart the effect of out-of-body-experience (OOBE) is an exceptional one.

The esoteric writings on the topic are numerous. But they are not liable to evaluation and therefore lie outside the scope of such studies.

The world made of light. The world made of light is a world created by the mind and modelled by the interaction of mental models. This world is as real as the physical one.

change after return

In the narratives of persons gone through death experience the presence of re-evaluation and change of life in the scale of knowledge of death is palpable.

new attitude to death

In one or another form all those people express one and the same thought – *that they are no more afraid of death.*

Chapter 10. Mystic reflections

mastering dying

In Tibet, Buddhism, alloyed with yoga, has born a marvellous thanato-culture, the summit of which undoubtedly is the mysterious *Bardo Thodol* – the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

“By assistance from the Manuals a man with an exceptionally developed mind will achieve Release. If he is not freed in the Transitional State (Bardo – S. G.) of the instant of Death it is necessary to accomplish a transfer of consciousness. Even the memory of this process will bring release ...”

mastering the world beyond

According to Raja-Yoga the external world is nothing but a crude variety of the inner and subtle. He who has found out how to manage inner forces can become master of nature... He wants to reach the point where the so called ‘laws of nature’ will have no effect on him so that he will be able to step beyond their bounds.

magic explanation

In his explanation the Nagual Juan Matus says: “It is true for a seeing man that all living creatures struggle to die. And consciousness is what holds back death. ... I told you that the Tonal begins with birth and ends with death.”

Chapter 11. Thanatology

NDE – explanations

In *clinical death* the molecular, sub-cellular and cellular processes run at a functional minimum. The average duration of clinical death is about 3-7 min. Artificial conditions can be created (Negovsky et al.) – hypothermy for example – when clinical death continues about 1 hour.

Physiological and neurological explanations. Noyes and Kletti explain the *panorama of life* with the attack-like neural strikes in the occipital lobe. According to Moody and Sabom this does not explain the order of visions. Moody rejects the explanation from insufficiency of oxygen or the production of CO₂ in the brain. That seems dubious also to Osis and Haraldson. Visual near death experience is most frequently accompanied by clear consciousness. Is the activation of an *unconscious programme* in the instant of death possible? A transformation, which sensitizes to the perception of a ‘new reality’? The same objection holds here.

Some people find similarity between near death visions and hallucinations in *sensory isolation*. The brain is isolated from sense experience. There are no kinesthetic sensations too. But this account of basic neurological activities in the brain does not explain seeing and hearing of actual scenes from reanimation.

programmed adaptation

The limits of species duration of life are genetically determined. Individuals have to die for the sake of renewal and adaptation of the species.

Unicellular organisms are unique for not dying as long as food is available.

the arrow of time

Thermodynamics introduces the arrow of time (Second principle). Entropy in the world rises to infinity. Living organisms temporarily neutralize the growth of entropy by absorbing energy. In the event entropy destroys the living body.

limits of scientific explanation

Limits of evolutionary explanation. The explanation of individual death as evolutionary ‘necessity’ implies that the death of living organisms can be avoided as in unicellular organisms. It would seem that, although organisms may be immortal, selection happened to make them mortal, thus achieving some evolutionary profit. But this is physical absurdity since death is physically unavoidable. Such explanation does not take death to be an attribute of life, therefore it is also a biological absurdity. The species has no independent life. There is no such living being as *the species*, for the sake of which individuals are to be sacrificed.

Aging, as well as its consequence – natural death – is a manifestation of ‘error’ in the regulation of DNA-replication. Both boil down to the inability of DNA to preserve itself. Aging is the slowing down of metabolic processes, and this is impossible to characterize as ‘adaptation’.

It is unsatisfactory to explain involutionary factors in the individual’s biography – aging and death – as adaptation. Aging and dying are contrary to the demands of biological expansion and particularly to the individual’s will.

Limits of biological explanation. The hope for a scientific solution of the problem of death is associated with the hope for a *new biological theory*, which would finally solve Darwin’s and synthetic theory’s unsolved problems.

The thermodynamic explanation of death does not grasp the biological sense of death because *there is no such sense*.

Limits of physical understanding. 1. Physics, contrary to

biology, for which death is absurd, takes death to be the most natural state. If we could disregard the existence of life, classical mechanics would triumph. Insofar there is no physical explanation of death as an aspect of life.

Even the most up to date physics, no more than classical physics, cannot distinguish theoretically the living from the non-living. Both are not able to answer the question “Why is a thing constructed this way?”

Chapter 12. The experience of dying

Boundary experience, indescribable with exactness in any language, lies *entirely beyond the scope of contemporary scientific method*. Empirical ascertaining of the visions in NDE, similarly to ascertaining sensations, is *impossible*. Sensation itself is not directly observable.

the world is running out

Even *the diminution or abolition of the fear of death*, as a sole consequence of making sense of NDE, would be sufficiently fundamental to make it necessary. Beyond the bounds of science remain the phenomena of out-of-body-experience and observing one’s own body from the side (autoscopia). Outside science remains the acceptance of illusions as a kind of reality and their investigation.

The word ‘illusion’ itself is philosophically problematic since nobody knows what ‘reality’ is outside the world of senses and thought. *The flow of consciousness (the flow of the world) in a state of clinical death* is similar to the one found in dreams. Here too the question of its *ontological interpretation* stands open.

The visions of this boundary phenomenon are qualitatively different from dreams, above all for having a common type of plot, whereas dreams are infinitely varied. They are interlaced with *the seeing and hearing of actual sounds and*

pictures from the environment.

Obviously two 'realities', planes, or *worlds* mix, overlap, merge into one another in NDE. Here Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is pertinent: The limits of the world coincide with the limits of logic, language, the ordering of events. The limits of the world are limits of the metaphysical subject. They are limits of the I.

The experience of dying is *transition between realities* with the merging characteristic of any transition. It has no 'pure ontological characteristics'. NDE is not dying and there is no real 'switching over' in it, there is no clearness as to the qualities of 'the other world' and of the other 'living form', into which people, possibly, are transformed in dying. There is no human concept, which could refer by virtue of perception and rationality to this 'beyond' – our language depends on the perceptible reality it refers to.

And nevertheless certain continuity of experience seems to be preserved. It is unclear whether the I lives on, but psychic life continues. Intentionality of consciousness, its directedness towards objects, is preserved to a degree. 'Making' the world through description of sensations is preserved.

However all the basic properties of the apprehended world and of the object-directed consciousness radically change. There is transition to *another phenomenological order*. Things are 'linked' in a new way. The compositions of the thing-being are changed. Things are build in an entirely new way. The physical world vanishes as non-transparent, opaque, solid, weighty. Consciousness and, more generally, the psychic, dominates. The reality 'beyond' is woven from wishes and misgivings, which are being accomplished, embodied.

One covers a way lying in the man's boundary zone. One sets out from this world for a place, from which there is no return. *'The boundary' is not a line, it is an area* where the visions form beyond and seeing the things of this world can

interlace.

In any case, *each of us, human beings, has the right to find in herself/himself a clear sign where she/he is going.* And it is as if that sign exists: even amidst the strongest pain I can clearly take awareness of my pain and of its being transient. And in this awareness there is no trace of the pain. The waking witness of pain and joy, of risking and dying is the mind or what remains from it.

It seems that dying, like dreaming, can be mastered. If one gives credit to yoga and Buddhism, we can transfer ourselves beyond our bounds. *When the world is running out we must transfer ourselves across our bounds.*

transformaion

In what sense that experience of dying is interpreted as passing into another world? In the sense that the consolidated totality of thought, sense and ‘physics’ is exchanged for something else; it is dissolved and re-composed again. The new ‘composition’ can be spoken of only conventionally. ‘Epistemology of the transcendental’ is sui generis application of the epistemology of the immanent to boundary experience.

Those phenomenal characteristics, once stated, follow local trajectories. In an indefinite degree the outlining of the world follows its interpretation, description, ‘making’ by a community of perceiving beings.

In experience on the bounds another ordering of things, another object-being (space-time-categories-logic) is revealed. Other attributes – phenomenological forms – are mapped out. But definiteness remains dim insofar as experience would be adequate only in full passage, full ‘transformation into another corporeality and mentality’.

Sense perception. The dying person ‘hears’ and ‘sees’, but not with physical eyes and ears. (Her eyes are closed.) She sees in two environments at once.

Corporeality. Another kind of perception implies another kind of corporeality. Thousands of pages are written about ‘body 2’, ‘Doppelgänger’, the ‘astral’, ‘spiritual’, ‘ethereal’, ‘metaphysical’ body, and much more nonsense than proposals for a solution. Perhaps it is from here that ‘ghosts’ and all the mythology around them spring.

Space. The dying person is ‘in the room’ but outside her body. There, along with the objects in the room, she sees the tunnel (blackness); live, soft light; relatives; scenes from her life; the barrier. It is as if the dying person ‘is transferring herself’.

The space on the other side is disoriented; it has no coordinate system and no clear dimensionality. There scenes ‘from past life’ may appear one after another. ‘Floating in blackness’ is very fast and prolonged to be reconciled with the physical distance of a few meters on which one who has risen above his body is removed. In its indefiniteness this space resembles that of dreams.

Time. As in dreams, within seconds of physical time in the visions scenes of immense duration are played out. Analogously to space, no definite duration, period, coordinate system is present. *It is unclear whether visions are from the future, past or present. It is unclear whether those categories have any sense at all.*

‘Causality’ (categories). Events are linked in an odd way. It is not at all clear why one thing follows another. They are

groundless, unexpected and incomprehensible – as in a dream. And nevertheless they form a meaningful or interpretable sequence.

Rambling in new, unknown and alien places follows the formlessness of our own being. This no one's state, in which we are definitely somewhere and as if simultaneously on different places, is a state of disintegrity, fragmentariness and disconnectedness.

Consciousness and self-consciousness. Psychic life goes on without final oblivion or falling through. Oblivion applies only to the period of darkness; after that the past is regained. One remembers, knows and recognizes the past, the world and the objects from the physical world left behind. One wonders if he is dead. *Consciousness remains, sense perception is changed. Meaning remains, causality is changed.*

Language.

The events and forms from beyond *cannot be adequately described*. They become describable thanks to *the work of interpretation* after the vision or during the vision itself when we are saying to ourselves: 'This over here is Christ' or 'This over here is a tunnel' or 'This over here is a pedestal'. All those identifications are distorting, they come from elsewhere and their place is not here.

All that is narrated is a projection of an alien experience into a network of meanings belonging to this world. 'Seeing', 'hearing' and 'thinking', as well as 'speaking' with other beings are neither seeing, nor hearing, nor thinking, nor conversation.

Morality. The transition has its emotional apex. This episode is most astonishing to reason. We are talking about *striking a balance*. Without any hint of reward or penalty, reproach or praise, before our spiritual gaze *life goes by carrying a transparent moral sense*. Everything acquires significance as if in a super-conscience.

In conclusion I propose a crucial thought experiment. If

we purge our waking world from our understanding, description and recognition of shapes, what do we get? We get a *chaotic flow similar to a dream or near death vision, vision in 'unconscious' state*. The aspect of the world for a baby must be similar to this.

This is a philosophical testimony that the visions in question, the interpretation put aside, are an unclear, incomplete world. What distinguishes this world is that it is devoid of empirically adequate, non-metaphorical description and understanding of the sort we have for the waking world.

the boundary of the world

Ludwig Wittgenstein. Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: “6.431 So too at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end.

6.4311 Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death.”

Karl Jaspers. Death: “when dying I suffer death but never experience it ... in dying when there is already no return I suffer my absolute ignorance.”³⁶

Such is the black-and-white ontology and epistemology of death.

From all things *a human being thinks highest of her life* and there is neither any force nor thought able to decline her from that insofar as she stands firmly on the ground. And if we comprehend death as destruction, as contemporary Western people usually comprehend it – in contrast to, e.g., people from the Middle Ages – this is to say that we *trust empirical knowledge and science on a question, which crowns all important questions and goes far beyond the capacities of this science*. To attach dull and insipid black-and-white speculations on all and nothing to the torments and hopes before death is to blur the picture and block thinking.

I also reject Kant’s distinction between ‘person’ and ‘thing’ in man, the former acknowledging God, immortality and freedom of will, the latter governed only by empirical

animal needs. There is no live human act, which is ontologically pure emanation of freedom or of dependence on the body. *The contradistinction itself of freedom and nature, spiritual and corporeal is fundamentally mistaken.*

There is a position, according to which other creatures in the world do not know about death or are devoid of consciousness, lack this or have not grown up for that. It severs man from them by enduing him with some ontological privileges. This is a very superficial and unphilosophical stance.

A boundary is a boundary because it delimits forms, levels, realities, worlds. I cannot imagine *the boundary as sinking into nothingness*. Nothingness cannot be thought with definiteness, it cannot be thought as confined by a boundary. To think the transcendent as nothingness is to think the immanent as all. But when thinking it as all we know nothing of it.

Should death be not my death, but something that falls down on me and makes away with me, then its permanent possibility would be only an external and indefinite threat of wiping out all that I am. And should death be independent on me, I could not infer anything from my consciousness of it. I am mortal: today I am; tomorrow I shall die. What then? What have I to do?

Destruction would first destroy my real mainstays. I would take life to be a ludicrous sparkle coming from nothingness and going back into it as if it never was there. Then man would be equally able to live his life sacredly, but senselessly, because there is no God, and wildly, going through all the range of sensations, trying to wrest out of his empirical faculties all he is able to. In moral language this would read: "Anything is permissible!" In front of death I am free and responsible only if death is my death, my act, if, hence, I experience it and live through it. And this is possible only if death is a live transition, in which I am preserved as an agent.

While dying we are still living. We are going our way on the earth. We *are dwelling* and *knowing*, we are *trying*. Dying is lived through and is therefore experience. Awareness of dying and mastering it turns it into experience similar to waking, but incomparably stronger and deeper.

While dying a man is so *impaired* that he usually is not able to control things and commits himself to 'fate'. We startle before the mystery of this destruction. As the world slips away, we have to pass over the decisive boundary in order to experience another world. It is here that finality of death lies. Were death something transparent, it would not present us with finality.

No one has by now determined which exactly the moment of a man's irretrievable death is. The line of death most probably does not exist.

Chapter 13. Human form

tonal and nagual

Carlos Castaneda recounts: "The beetle emerged from a deep hole and stopped a few inches away from my face. It seemed to look at me and for a moment I felt that it became aware of my presence, perhaps as I was aware of the presence of my death. I experienced a shiver. The beetle and I were not that different after all. Death, like a shadow, was stalking both of us from behind the boulder. I had an extraordinary moment of elation. The beetle and I were on a par. Neither of us was better than the other. Our death made us equal."

human form

To find the boundary is to find a basic definition, a ground, a fundament. To find our human boundaries is to get some grasp of our own form as a kind of living and conscious beings endowed with will.

This is *the human form*. Here I introduce a new anthropological concept.

Man is a *form of life* and as such is not Creator of life.

The phenomenological philosophy of the 20th century is directed at the whole of the forms, in which human life of an I is accomplished as a *life world*.

The structure of the human soul corresponds (is congruent) to the organization of the human body. The sense and nature of this correspondence is unclear, but most probably here we have to do with one single whole divided by language and thinking. The order of human spirit corresponds in its terrestrial form to the order of the soul and the organization of the body. But the distinction body-soul-spirit is itself conventional. There is here a *live totality* destroyed or rearranged in death.

How does the incorporeal soul control the material body? How does the impulse of my mind turn into movement of my muscles? These questions are a token of narrow-mindedness. They are enmeshed by the idea of ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’, which is not self-evident.

Human form is inexplicable in its synthesis. It is an intuitively clear ‘totality’ synthesized in conception and birth and disintegrated in death. In a sense, human form and the human world are changed in dreaming.

The human world is set up accordingly to human form. It is ‘lit up’ by that form. It contains colours, sounds, smells, tactile and gustatory sensations. It is unclear how we fix and distinguish the things in this world – to what degree do we do this in accordance with the mode of description accepted by our culture, and to what degree in accordance with inborn constants of the spiritual, mental and corporeal order?