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It is a complex unity: one step for life, one step for thought. Modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living. Life *activates* thought, and thought in turn *affirms* life.¹

I

Cancel my subscription to the resurrection
The Doors, 'When the Music's Over' in *Strange Days* (1967)

[...] men forgot that All Deities reside in the Human breast
William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793)

When Nietzsche affirms that 'God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!', the existential paradigm of religious society is subverted.² If God exists, and he promises to us an eternal redemption that overcomes death and confers transcendental meaning to life, then his symbolic death denies all transcendence. In other words, God's existence assures not only a post-mortem realm, but also an entire structure of values related to this immortal dynamic: a *good* person – according to religious standard – shall achieve heaven, but the morally corrupt shall end up in hell. With God's death, however, this ultimate meaning that guided life's actions is lost. As Sartre puts it, 'existence comes before essence'; we are brought into this world before we know the reason for our existence.³ This the case, mortality itself is affirmed as the ultimate certainty, which on the one hand denies a transcendental meaning to life, and on the other, ensures that 'instead of being burdened from the outside, man takes the weights and places them on his own back'.⁴ Acknowledging his mortality, the human being is left with an individual responsibility to find the meaning of his existence: 'There is no future. Henceforth this is

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. by Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), p.66.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 120.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1966), p. 26.

⁴ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, p.71.

the reason for my inner freedom'.⁵ But could we interpret Jim Morrison's lyrics 'This is the end [...] can you picture what will be / so limitless and free' in this existential context?⁶ Morrison's persona begins to insinuate itself from this premise: an obsession with mortality, a certain revindication of freedom. He asks: 'why the desire for death?' and it is known that Nietzsche was no stranger to him – he even improvised an ode to the philosopher.⁷ What, then, are the consequences of assuming individual freedom?

The acknowledgement of mortality implies the notion of duration. Life is understood between two moments, birth and death, and in that gap 'modern non-religious man assumes a tragic existence and [...] his existential choice is not without its greatness'.⁸ In a lifetime, he must ascribe meaning to his actions, a meaning detached from any form of closure besides death itself, therefore:

in rejecting any transcendent absolute, he is left with this world and this life. These, as we saw, become the sole possible source of value. Since there is no external standard, one may be tempted to hold that differences of value can only arise from quantitative differences in this world – from the amount of it.⁹

In this domain, no action holds greater value than another – 'there is no truth, but merely truths'.¹⁰ What follows is an 'ethic of quantity'¹¹, in which 'amount', or volume of experience acquires new privilege, and which is addressed in Morrison's Self-Interview:

Real poetry doesn't say anything, it just ticks off possibilities. Opens all the doors. You can walk through any that suits you... If my poetry aims to achieve anything, it's to deliver people from the limited ways in which they see and feel.¹²

The nihilistic approach to the paradigm – 'the world looks *valueless*' – should here be avoided, as it reduces the equality of action's value to its non-value.¹³ As Morrison states,

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 58.

⁶ 'The End' in *The Doors* (California: Elektra, 1967).

⁷ Jim Morrison, *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 199; Milady Cynthia, *The Doors - Ode to Friedrich Nietzsche*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 January 2011 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=9p-HIfr29fk> [accessed 24 March 2019].

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the profane*, trans. by Willard R. Trask. Harcourt (New York: Brace & World, 1963), p. 203.

⁹ Herbert Hochberg, 'Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity', *Ethics*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Jan. 1965) 87-102, (p. 93).

¹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 43.

¹¹ Hochberg, 'Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity', p. 93.

¹² Morrison, *Wilderness*, p. 2.

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, Inc, 1967), p. 13; Although it seems relevant to notice the remark done by Hochberg on the proximity and potential risk between an *ethic of quantity* and a nihilistic vision of life, as it 'obviously contains the seed of

‘all the doors’ are open, because it is only with all the doors detached from an *à priori* value that people can be delivered from the limited ways in which they live.

Morrison’s engagement with freedom in the wake of God’s symbolical death is characteristic of the Sixties counterculture. As traditional values were transgressed and new directions for society were desired, he emerged almost as a model of this generation. In the same way that the Sixties were defined by a search of new values (civil rights, equal rights, pacifist politics), and the exploitation of unprecedented hypotheses (hallucinogenic experiences, antisystem ideas, sexual liberation), Morrison assumes an attitude of transgression and experimentation. As Deleuze puts it, ‘to create is to resist’.¹⁴ But could we invert the formula, and suggest that to resist is to create? If all actions have the same value, should we not resist those that were already there, imposed by inherited forces, in order to establish a common ground where they all are possible? Only through resistance can a new opening be possible, a door. As Morrison says, ‘Let’s recreate the world, the palace of Conception is burning’.¹⁵ In order to achieve a bigger realm of possibilities, the world must be recreated through the fall of the structure that sustained our imposed beliefs.

Morrison internalised the dynamics of freedom in his writings as much as in his performances, testing the boundaries of the establishment – here I will state three examples that present different subversions of established codes or conducts in the time that they occurred. First, the improvisation in ‘The End’ at the Whisky a Go Go (1966), when he would introduce the mythical Oedipus theme.¹⁶ Second, the appearance at the Ed Sullivan’s show (1967), when Morrison sang the verse “we couldn’t get much higher”, in violation of explicit pre-warnings.¹⁷ Third, the controversial concert in Miami (1969), in which Morrison was accused of lewd behavior, amongst other charges of indecent exposure and profanity.¹⁸ Provocation towards family institution, disobedience of media’s censorship, assault on public morality – Morrison transgressed several strains of society:

nihilism – a potential justification for a future Marquis de Sade’. ‘Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity’, p. 93.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, ‘R comme Résistance’ in *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (interviewed by Claire Parinet) (Arte, 1995).

¹⁵ Morrison, *Wilderness*, p. 11.

¹⁶ James Henke, *The Jim Morrison Scrapbook* (California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2007), p.31.

¹⁷ The Doors Property, ‘The Doors on the Ed Sullivan Show’ in *The Doors* (revised September 2017) <www.thedoors.com/news/the-doors-on-the-ed-sullivan-show> [24 March 2019]

¹⁸ John Burks, ‘Jim Morrison’s Indecency Arrest: Rolling Stone’s Original Coverage’ in *Rolling Stone* (revised December 2010) <www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/jim-morrison-indecency-arrest-rolling-stones-original-coverage-250814/> [24 March 2019]

private, social and cultural. But we should interpret this attitude in the realm of artistic endeavor. When questioned about his opinion on liberalism in the arts, and whether it should be applied to music, he answered that ‘in the realm of art and theatre I do think it should be complete freedom to the artist and performer. [...] the artist should feel free to use it [nudity] if he feels like it’.¹⁹ In this sense, musical performance assumes the characteristics and privileges of theatre, allowing resistance and subversion against established moral codes. In his artistic condition, Morrison understands the relativity of values we associate to actions, which again alludes to the existential paradigm that asserts that there is no truth, but merely truths.

II

Common sense tells us that the things of the earth exist only a little, and that true reality is only in dreams.

Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises* (1860)

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Matthew, 7, 14

-moment of inner freedom
when the mind is opened & the
infinite universe revealed
& the soul is left to wander
dazed & confus’d searching
here & there for teachers & friends

Jim Morrison, *The Opening of the Trunk*.

I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which Morrison adopts an existentialist posture regarding his theory and his practice, and how this posture seems to converge with the historical period he witnessed: reflections on mortality, revindication of artistic and individual freedom, subversion of dominant and imposed values. Nonetheless, ‘every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world’; despite the flirtation with death, Morrison shows some divergences to the existentialist way of thinking.²⁰ His persona accepts some degree of contradiction for the benefit of a wider understanding of the world. For Morrison, an ethic of quantity did not invalidate an exploration of phenomena and ideas that might be regarded as mystical or spiritual. To the contrary, these ideas subsist on their inherent contradiction. Morrison draws on

¹⁹ Wolfson Archives, *Jim Morrison Interview in Miami August 12, 1970*, online video recording, Youtube, 19 December 2008 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttqoqe5uJ9s> [accessed 24 March 2019].

²⁰ Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. by Basil Creighton (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1957), p. 59.

images that challenge a religious conception of the world – ‘Let me tell you about heartache and the loss of God / [...] no eternal reward will forgive us now for wasting the dawn’ – as much as they reclaim some sacred aura: ‘Let’s reinvent the gods, all the myths of the ages / Celebrate symbols from deep elder forest’.²¹ One of the most representative events that confirms the mystical presence in Morrison’s life is addressed in *Dawn’s Highway*, the song referencing an accident with dead Indians from his early childhood:

a truck load of Indian workers had either hit another car [...] but there were Indians scattered all over the highway, bleeding to death. [...] That was the first time I tasted fear. I must have been four [...] The reaction I get now thinking about it, looking back, is that the souls of the ghosts of those dead Indians – maybe one or two of them – were just running around freaking out, and just leaped into my soul. And they’re still in there.²²

This occurrence, called *metempsychosis*, or the transmigration of the soul, demonstrates Morrison’s predisposition to spiritual phenomena. It implies that, as Jung explains, ‘life is prolonged in time by passing through different bodily existences; or, from another point of view, it is a life-sequence interrupted by different reincarnations’.²³ In this, we are approaching an event that returns us to a mystical perception of experience – one that points towards the paradigm of God, or at least to the supernatural. Mircea Eliade offers a pertinent concept regarding this episode of Morrison’s life – the *hierophany*, ‘the *act of manifestation* of the sacred’, describing a ‘mysterious act – the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world’.²⁴ It is interesting to note how the sacred immediately assumes a qualitative difference towards phenomena, as opposed to the existential claim that all actions have the same value; in this claim, the existentialist conception of the world is incompatible with that of the sacred. Still, the interest here is not so much to define if Morrison’s conception of the world is sacred or profane, but to enunciate the differences between a theoretical model of presenting the world and its practical subversion through experience.

In this approach, another pertinent element of mystical ambiguity reveals itself in Morrison’s stage persona. Live concerts – a crucial component in ‘The Doors’ artistic project – are for Morrison more closely affiliated to notions of ritual than to mere

²¹ ‘The WASP’ in *L.A. Woman* (California: Elektra, 1971); ‘An American Prayer’ in *An American Prayer* (California: Elektra, 1978).

²² ‘Dawn’s Highway’ in *An American Prayer* (California: Elektra, 1978).

²³ Carl G. Jung, ‘Concerning Rebirth’ in *Collected Works of C. C. Jung, Volume Nine, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 113 – 134 (p. 113).

²⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 11; Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 11.

performance. He says, ‘it’s kind of like human sculpture. In a way it’s like art, because it gives form to energy’, referring maybe to what Jung recalls as *participation mystique* – when a group is too big, it results in some kind of common animal soul, an unconscious identification.²⁵ This concurrence of energies, of forces that ally, is similar to the feeling of communion displayed in religious celebrations. In a videotaped conversation with Pastor Fred Stagemeyer, addressing the essence of ‘The Doors’ musical shows, Morrison answers that ‘this kind of things have been going on for a long time. It’s kind of like secular religion’.²⁶ In a way, this statement resumes the ambiguity of Morrison character, standing between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the religious. When Camus says that ‘the actor’s realm is that of the fleeting’, he adds that:

The actor will die in three hours under the mask he has assumed today. Within three hours he must experience and express a whole exceptional life, the whole course of the dead-end path that the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover.²⁷

Here we notice the complex relation between mortality and transcendence under the figure of the performer. Because even though he *embodies* a fiction of life duration, with its beginning and end – a reproduction of existential paradigm – he also is immortal, in the sense that all concerts are ‘custom or a repetition, an habitually recurring plan or pageant that has a meaning’.²⁸ The actor dies and reborn in each performance, in each concert: ‘It could be defined as follows: access to spiritual life always entails death to the profane condition, followed by a new birth’.²⁹ In this context, Morrison becomes more mystical than profane, allowing himself to experience the boundaries of mortality in a ritualistic environment.

We start to glimpse the possibility of transcendence related to the paradoxical relation between death and rebirth, outside of the jurisdiction of God or religion; a tangent search for metaphysical solutions. This pursuit defined a domain of the Sixties counterculture movement, generally associated with the consumption of hallucinogens, and represented by figures such as Timothy Leary (*turn on, tune in, drop out*), who were looking to question reality through an examination of consciousness – ‘Drugs are a bet

²⁵ Jim Morrison, *The Rolling Stone Interview: Jim Morrison* (interviewed by Jerry Hopkins for Rolling Stone) (26 July 1969) <<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-rolling-stone-interview-jim-morrison-73308/>> [24 March 2019]; Jung, ‘Concerning Rebirth’, p. 125.

²⁶ Guy Bolich, *Jim Morrison talking to pastor Fred L. Stagemeyer*, online video recording, YouTube, 10 March 2014 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUT5DYSPV68> [accessed 24 March 2019].

²⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 74; Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 76.

²⁸ *The Rolling Stone Interview: Jim Morrison*.

²⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 201.

w/your mind'.³⁰ But the most significant reference to the subject matter is Aldous Huxley's book on mescaline, *The Doors of Perception* (1954), whose title gave the name to The Doors, and which derived in turn from William Blake's words: 'if the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite'.³¹ We can see that Morrison and the band believed that it could be some connection between reality and something apart. The song *Break on Through to (The Other Side)* and Morrison's verses 'where I can construct a universe / within the skull, to rival the real' confirm this assumption.³² The hypothesis claims that in some way, or somewhere, there's a bond between reality and the unknown – a symbolic door. A theory that was not strange to old beliefs, that suggested a 'paradoxical passage' and 'made plentiful use of the symbolism of the Perilous Bridge or the Narrow Gate'.³³ Eliade adds that 'the threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds, and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate'.³⁴ Huxley also highlights the concept of the foreigner world, using the metaphor of the antipodes, referring to a New World situated in the opposite location of the Old World, the one we inhabit now in our ignorance.

However, new hypotheses on transcendence approach an internal discovery associated with the mind rather than the possibility of the divine's existence or the supernatural presence in some mystical way. One of those theories is the Jungian concept of *psychic reality*:

Far from being a material world, this is a psychic world which allows us to make only indirect and hypothetical inferences about the real nature of matter. The psychic alone has immediate reality, and this includes all forms of the psychic, even «unreal» ideas and thoughts which refer to nothing «external».³⁵

According to Jung, we don't perceive reality as it really is, but only through the images that our mind creates from the material world. 'We live immediately only in a world of images', so the world we apprehend is an interpretation of the mind.³⁶ Nietzsche puts it in the following terms: 'how an action and the image of an action differ [...] how

³⁰ Morrison, *Wilderness*, p. 78.

³¹ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), p. 93.

³² Jim Morrison, *The Lords and the New Creatures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), p. 42.

³³ Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 181.

³⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 25.

³⁵ Carl G. Jung, 'The Real and The Surreal' in *Collected Works of C. C. Jung, Volume Eight, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 382 - 384 (p. 384).

³⁶ Jung, 'The Real and The Surreal', p. 384.

thoughts and images are, like words, only signs of thoughts³⁷. From this standpoint, reality is only distinguished from the images of the mind as far as we define which images belong to reality. We consider reality what happens ‘outside’ of the mind, but we cannot deny the mind’s reality. Dreams, ideas, imagination – they belong to which kingdom? ‘We are steeped in a world that was created by our own psyche’.³⁸ Again, we are talking about subversion of reality’s codes, or its expansion: resistance as a path to creation. Or is not reality the ultimate imposed restriction?

Arhat's flight express a break in ontological level and passage from one mode of being to another, or, more precisely, passage from conditioned existence to an unconditioned mode of being, that is, to perfect freedom.³⁹

Freedom, in its multiple forms, is a continuous subject matter throughout Morrison’s life and work. He appears to be, in the context of the essay’s subject matter, the archetype of resistant existentialism, conscious of his own mortality but open to individual experience of transcendence. But we should not regard Morrison’s *persona* as an example on becoming free as much as we should value his attitude towards life, an attitude in which we may feel an echo from Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* – ‘the *nonspecific* representation, the undermined embodiment if you will, of a certain attitude towards life and world’, for ‘in the long run, it is not a question of man at all: he is to be overcome’.⁴⁰ To put it on simple terms, in Morrison’s desire to question meaning – and by ultimately giving to this desire the meaning to his existence – he undermines his own vulnerability as a being.

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³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 358.

³⁸ Jung, ‘The Real and the Surreal’, p. 384.

³⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ Bernd Magnus, ‘Perfectibility and Attitude in Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 36, No.3 (Mar. 1983), p. 643; ⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 358.

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