
GLIMPSES OF TRUTH IN A SEA OF NESCIENCE: REFLECTIONS ON *EREIGNIS* IN ART IN WÖLFLI, HEIDEGGER AND ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

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Figure 1: Wölfli 1905. *Medizinische Fakultät*. © 2021 Adolf Wölfli Stiftung

ABSTRACT

Martin Heidegger's deconstruction of Western Metaphysics was a project designed to retrieve an appreciation of the question of Being through a distancing from the distortions created by the history metaphysics itself. This project takes several forms, but a particularly radical form can be seen by interpreting Heidegger's work *Contributions to Philosophy* in the light of the Indian philosophical tradition, Advaita Vedānta. We find in this juxtaposition an accentuation of three concepts: Self, concealment and Being. The relation of these three elements can be seen within the movement of the work of art, and can be seen especially vividly in outsider art. It is in outsider art that we see the movement towards a disruption which breaks us free from metaphysical thought, throwing us into a pre-metaphysical realm, while still under influence of what Advaita philosophy would call nescience [*māyā, avidyā*]. We intent to show in this article that the works of Adolf Wölfli can be seen as a manifestation of the rupture of 'pre-metaphysical occurrence' disrupting our normal discourse; an occurrence that ultimately can be verified only by its own example, as a unique appearance.

Keywords: Adolf Wölfli; Martin Heidegger; Advaita Vedānta; nescience; outsider art

Introduction

Heidegger's critique of metaphysics involves the idea that the history of metaphysics conceals the most important question in philosophy, the question of Being. So much of Heidegger's early work was a project designed to peel away the distortions of our understanding or truth, in order to retrieve or uncover this question of Being.

This project is continued in Heidegger's radicalized question concerning Being as such, i.e. Beyng, as expressed in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (*Contributions to Philosophy*) (hereafter shortened to *Beiträge*)². Heidegger designates a pre-ontological condition 'Beyng' [*Seyn*], spelled with an 'y', as opposed to the metaphysical 'Being' [*Sein*], which is reflected and developed within Western philosophy as such. Furthermore, when the *Beiträge* is interpreted in the light of an Indian philosophical tradition, Advaita Vedānta, there emerged a significant accentuation of three crucial concepts: Self, concealment and Beyng.

The *Beiträge* expressed a critique of Western calculative culture as conditioned by a metaphysical state termed 'machination' [*Machenschaft*], which is seen as an ever intensifying metaphysical distortion of a true pre-metaphysical Beyng. This metaphysical distortion is inherently connected to its 'true source', as an original pervasive occurrence [*Ereignis*] which conditions any 'later' metaphysical object-related concepts of truth. Now, if a pervasive distortion is active in this self-propagating way, clouding our sense of what is true and real, then everything we can relate to must be affected by this pervasive deficiency, similar to Advaita Vedānta's Sanskrit concepts of a cosmic nescience, predominately expressed as *avidyā* or *māyā*.

The underlying presumption of this study is that art represent a potency, which has the capability to disrupt the dominating (false) object-being [*Sein*], and bring forward a glimpse of true Beyng [*Seyn*]. The question is now: What kind of art might possess this power? And how is this thought to be operative within our common modes of understanding? We intend to show in this article that the works of Adolf Wölfler can be seen as a manifestation of a 'pre-metaphysical occurrence', as a comprehensive refusal of our normal understanding of self and world.

Machination and the Radical Difference

The *Beiträge* distinguishes itself from traditional philosophy by its peculiar *distancing*; a positioning of itself outside conventional Western philosophy, which only expresses and propagates a metaphysical distortion

of the original Beyng. This distancing in the *Beiträge* owes its peculiar position to an inexpressible otherness, projected through the concept of an *Ereignis*, which can be defined as an occurrence of Beyng beyond the comprehensive distortion of truth, machination, in this study interpreted as a manifestation of nescience.

This ‘distortion’ in *Beiträge*, denotes a way of perceiving everything there *is*, as derived from objects [*seiendes*] in their character of makeability [*Machbarkeit*], which conceal the real source of their original illumination.³ In *Machenschaft*, the ‘*Machen-*’ (make, do, produce) is to be understood as a reference to the passive *Wissen* (knowledge) in *Wissenschaft* (science), which signifies a calculating cognition corresponding to the active makeability (manipulation) of objects. This understanding of objects, as something that can be acted upon and subsumed in a field of calculative knowledge and planning, is ‘superimposed’ on Being as such [*Seyn*], affecting everything (‘beings’) which can be understood or articulated. Therefore, the question of true Beyng requires a withdrawal [*Ent-zug*] from all representational calculation in a fundamental refusal [*Verweigerung*] of the world of utilization, i.e. of understanding subsumed to makeability.⁴

How is this refusal possible? Does it mean anything else than a pure negation, given that it is deprived of any means of positive articulations? This problem of articulation of an incomparable other truth, in the context of an all-pervasive nescience, is the reason behind the seemingly detour to an Indian tradition. The point is that the Advaita Vedānta tradition regards any form of conceptualization or differentiation as part of a comprehensive illusory potency [*māyā, avidyā*], and insists that this illusion can only be dispelled through an event of true knowledge of a non-dualistic reality.

The Advaitic Nescience and Truth

Śaṅkarācārya (8th century CE), regarded as the founder of the tradition of Advaita Vedānta, formulated the concepts of a nescience [*māyā or avidyā*] and an ultimate reality [*Brahman*] in his commentary on *Bādarāyaṇa’s Brahmasūtras* (3rd–2nd century BCE).⁵ Nescience refers

to the entire phenomenal world in which humans and things appear, while ultimate reality means an incommensurable true Being, the ground of nescience and yet beyond any conceivable difference. Ultimate reality, *Brahman*, cannot be thought of as an object or an entity; Brahman is beyond categories of beings - and the realization that the apparent phenomenal reality *is* in fact Brahman is the achievement of true knowledge, *vidyā*, which frees the Self from the bondage of *māyā*.⁶

The interesting point is now: What can be truly *said* about the prevailing absence of truth? The pluralistic world of objects and appearances are part of the workings of the pervasive indeterminable *māyā*, which binds the selves to a web of attachments. In this state of bondage is included an illusory self, the *antaḥkaraṇa*, here designating the intellect, mind and ego; all of which are regarded as instruments of cognition of phenomena, and therefore themselves essentially insentient and object-like.

Śaṅkara explains the state of nescience by positing a fundamental difference between self [*ātman*] and non-self [*anātman*],⁷ and characterizes this ontological difference as something that creates a fundamental *misconception*: “The mutual superimposition [*adhyāsa*] of the Self and the non-Self, which is termed Nescience [*avidyā*], is the presupposition on which there base all the practical distinctions”.⁸ The ‘practical distinctions’ accounts for the entire domain of differences within the phenomenal world. The circular logic of this conceptualization is due to the fact that the distinction between Self and non-Self is considered as both the cause of the ontological confusion, and an effect of the same misconception. Vācaspati Miśra in his *Bhāmatī* (9th century)⁹, a commentary on Śaṅkara’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, pointed out, that if the true Self [*ātman*] was radically different from any objective entity, then it could not be subject to nescience - and therefore he raised the question concerning the actual subject (location) of nescience. Miśra claimed that the operation of nescience has to be located in the individual self [*jīva*], because ignorance can never be associated with the pure Being, Brahman, and in this way he managed to preserve the truth of Brahman as an absolute *pure* Other.¹⁰ This made

necessary a differentiation of the concept of the self: An insentient inner cognizing organ [*antaḥkaraṇa*], a sentient individual Self [*jīva*] and a non-individual essential Self [*ātman*]; these three selves are connected to the mysterious workings of *māyā*, and to the dualistic tension between the indeterminable nescience and the corresponding radically different truth.

In Heidegger's terms, the differentiation between beings and Beyng can only be resolved by a transformative event, as a thrust [*Ruck*], which moves the self away from the order of things [*seiendes*]. This event is closely connected to a similar tripling of the meaning of the self in *Beiträge*, as in the *Bhāmatī*: Firstly, an "I" [*Ich*] reflecting the distortion of truth, the machination; secondly, a dubious but necessary Self [*Selbst*] part of machination as well as the truth, designating the place of the operation of the machination; and thirdly, an essential principle, the *Da-sein*, accessible only through the ambiguous Self.

Ereignis and the Unmanageable Strife

The concepts of Beyng and self are further explored in the *Beiträge* in an analysis of the phenomenon of death, which leads to the ultimate possibility of 'being-away' [*Weg-sein*], and further to nothingness [*Nichts/Nichthafte*]: Since Beyng implies a refusal [*Verweigerung*] of the unessential apparent Being [*unseiende*], Beyng *needs* the nothingness: "Since beyng is permeated with the "not" [*Nichthaft*], for the perseverance of its truth it needs the persistence of the not [*Nicht*] and thus also nonbeings [*Nichtige*]].¹¹ The path of understanding Beyng must go through the refusal of the object-being and the implications of negation, i.e. leaving the common, in order to engage in the strange [*Fremde*]. In this way the sense of the otherness of truth means that everything is transformed in the light of truth, and this is expressed as a sudden movement or displacement [*Versetzung*].¹² This concept of nothingness takes us beyond the negation "in the sense of an excess [*Übermaß*] of pure refusal."¹³ An 'excess of refusal' is not a return to the original point, rather it is a thinking which points towards a qualitative leap; a *choice* of a fundamental refusal that nonetheless both cancels and changes itself in retrospect.

This movement of negation of the common from which the “I” has defined itself, means that the subject (location) of nescience, the Self [*Selbst*] also possesses the power to free [*ent-setzen*] itself from the siege of things and the ‘false’ self. ‘*Ent-setzen*’ here possesses both the sense of being relocated, and the feeling of ‘horror’ of being torn from the common.¹⁴ This ambiguity is exactly what makes possible the occurrence of an *Ent-setzung*; fear of the unknown - and in the same movement: Being freed through a projection towards Beyng. This proximity to Beyng is to be understood as a timely transformative event [*Ereignis*], in which the Self is appropriated by Beyng, which ‘suddenly and properly’ shows everything in their own essences.¹⁵

In the “*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*” (The Origin of the Work of Art)¹⁶ this glimpse of an authentic understanding of Beyng is directly connected to works of art - a connection explicitly stated in *Beiträge*’s §247 as properly belonging to this paragraph as a ‘grounding’ (exposition) of the truth of the Self, the *Dasein*.¹⁷ The essential characteristic of an artwork is that art *evades* the ‘being of a utility’, the mark of the machination, because it exhibits a capability of a different order altogether.¹⁸ It sets up a world [*Welt*] as a whole, in a form of a new spaciousness [*Geräumigkeit*] in which beings can be met. Another aspect is that it discloses the necessary *support* of the setting forth [*Herstellung*] of the world, i.e. the earth [*Erde*] that moves into the open of the world. The important point here is that earth is a mystical concept which signifies that it essentially withdraws from every meaning.¹⁹ This implies an inherent conflict; on one hand, that the world of meanings has to determine that which remains closed to it, and on the other, that the earth has to preserve its self-seclusiveness to support meanings. This original unifying strife [*Streit*] of opposites is not a deficiency, but constitutes the essence of everything that can be. Not unlike a Heraclitean sense of a pre-ontological *Éris*, which lets everything show in a ‘unity of opposites’.²⁰

Heidegger’s claim is that this is what artworks *do*: they place a rift [*riß*] which instigates a strife between clearing [*Lichtung*] and concealing [*Verbergung*], between world and earth.²¹ This is the mark or fundamental

design of Beyng, designating an original timely appearing, a ‘clearing of beings’ [*Lichtung des seienden*].²² The artwork *fixates* (expresses) this rift/design in a figure [*Gestalt*] as a concrete placing [*stellen*].

This event in art of evoking the mystical earth and the meaningful world is what Heidegger terms a *thrust* [*Stoß*], a sudden movement to an ‘outside’ of the familiar things:

The more essentially this thrust comes into the open, the stranger and more solitary the works becomes [...] the more essentially the extraordinary is thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down [...]. To submit to this displacement [*Verrückung*] means: to transform all familiar relations to world and to earth.²³

This is truth in art: It leaves the realm of the common, and leads to an extraordinary appearing of the complete other.

Tantric Art

The *pāśupatis* were followers of the teaching taught by Paśupati (around 200 CE.) which aimed at a complete independence from the world, and which required from the devotees a transcending all material opposites by roaming cremation grounds and participate in ‘impure’ rituals, while continually practicing at least twelve years of yogic meditation.²⁴ One of the most striking examples of this transcendence by submergence is that of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyaṛ (5th or 6th Century CE.), a female poet and devotee of Śiva, from the early cult of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta.²⁵ Her poetry is characterized by a continual overflow of creativeness which obliterates the organized ”I”. In the *Periya Puranam* it is said that she prayed to Śiva that the earthly flesh she had worn for the sake of her husband would disappear and be replaced by the form of a skeleton, an appearance proper of complete devotion to the terrible form of Śiva. Her prayers were heard, and from the moment of her transformation, she roamed the cremation grounds of Tiruālangkādu. She is described as being smeared in ashes, engaging in erratic behavior and submerged

in a continual state of devotion to *Bhairava Śiva*:

Demons with flaming mouths and rolling, fiery eyes /
roaming around, doing the tuṇṇakai-dance / running and
dancing in the terrifying forest / draw out a burning corpse
from the fire and eat the flesh // The place where our Lord
raises His leg / with the hero's kalal jingling / and the
anklets tinkling / dancing so that the fire in His hand spreads
everywhere / and His hair whips around / is Tiruvāṅkāṭu.²⁶

There is no place for convention or even a community of devotees; there is only the divine vision of the object of her all-consuming devotion. The radical strategy of solitude and social distancing as a condition of insight, brings us to remember the words of *Beiträge* concerning the 'few and rare', who essentially do not belong to any community or group, which are excluded from an intimation of the true self.²⁷

This 'outsider approach' can be seen in Figure 2, the images of the terrible aspect of Śiva with his female part, the Goddess Kālī incorporated, which accentuates a distancing from a conventional godhead by a display of death, sexuality and aggressiveness framed within an ornamented ritualized space.

Art as Excess of Refusal: Adolf Wölffi

The term 'outsider art' carries specific historical and cultural meanings. According to David Maclagan's discussion of the expression, it refers to both the artworks and their artists.²⁸ He contends that such *artists* frequently lived on the margins of society and didn't fit into the conventional establishment, and that they frequently had no opportunities to formally 'learn the trade.' They rarely saw their creations as a form of individual artistic expression, and therefore didn't really think themselves as 'artists' at all. Maclagan further pointed out that the *artworks* were originally regarded as therapeutic byproducts of a psychiatric treatment; contributing to this view were several factors: the artworks didn't exhibit traits of conventional artistic styles, and they were frequently made of



Figure 2: The Hindu Goddess Kali and God Bhairava in Union. Painting; Watercolor. Los. Angeles County Museum of Art.

random materials of whatever was available to the artist, leaving an impression of a crude unreflective work. This impression was strengthened due to apparently purposeless repetitions of the same motifs, and that the works were frequently not approachable through conventional codes of representation, and therefore seemingly impenetrable to conventional artistic interpretations.²⁹

One of the most famous representatives of outsider art is the painter Adolf Wölfli (1864–1930) who was a resident of the Waldau psychiatric institution, located near Bern in Switzerland.³⁰ Wölfli's early life as an orphan and a child laborer, hired out to different foster families, is described as a harsh existence completely subjected to whatever the families would put him through. Later he endured a life of an itinerant laborer, did the military service and two years in prison, due to an attempted sexual assault on a young girl. After a similar incident he was committed to Waldau where he stayed till the end of his days.

Wölfli began to draw, write and compose in 1899, and worked continuously on his artworks until the end of his life. From 1908 onwards he began to systemize his productions by making references to overall narratives, which described adventurous travels around the world or fantastic autobiographical events, all of which were expressed in drawings, musical compositions, poetry, or fictional prose.

Walter Morgenthaler mentions Wölfli's peculiar method of working with his art as an almost mechanistic activity of drawing and writing. He worked continually without emotion with the exception of moments of hostility towards those who would interrupt his endless stream of creation.³¹ Wölfli's attitude towards his work can be described as almost painful, that is, a continual frustration due to his inability to capture the entire stream of his imaginative visions, over which he seemingly has no control. Morgenthaler uses the word *maßlosigkeit* to designate a hastiness, a ruthlessness, or a lack of moderation: Words chasing other words, forms and shades being reduplicated; an excess of flow of creations which relentlessly seek material to be manifested in.

The Whole is Less Than its Parts

The five works selected for this article are drawn from different periods of Wölfli's production: Figure 1 and 3 are selected from the period of "early drawings" (1904-1907) before Wölfli began attaching titles to series of works, figure 4 is taken from the theme titled *From the Cradle to the Grave* (1908-12), figure 5 from *Geographic and Algebraic Books* (1912-16), and figure 6 from the *Funeral March* (1928-1930).³² We will go through these selected works, which illustrate a certain development in Wölfli's style.

In **figure 1** (*Medizinische Fakultät*), reproduced at the beginning of this article, we find all the recurrent basic elements which are characteristic of Wölfli's works throughout his artistic development:³³ Ornamental 'strips' in different patterns are used as frames, either encircling the entire drawing or running through parts of it. In all areas of the drawings are inserted ornamental 'snails', individual or in a chain; a half-bow with one or two dots, similar to a stylized eye and ear. Similar insertions are visible everywhere in the drawings in the form of an ornamental small female bird ('*Vögelii*'), not unlike the snail, but with a bird-like form instead. Other frequently used elements are stylized black eyes, like an oversize pair of spectacle or pair of shadows hiding the eyes. Many variations of icon-like 'self-portraits' with or without mustaches, often combined with a black cross and/or black eyes. These recurrent elements are combined in characteristic symmetrical patterns on different levels of the design.

Furthermore, the particular features of Figure 1 reveals a monochrome composition constructed around both a vertical and a horizontal symmetry, but comprising a 'flow' of forms, which fill every bit of space. There is no representation of 'empty space' or any conventional horizon which would ground a representational orientation. An extreme excess of ornamental elements occupies the drawing, in the form of icon-faces and stylized organic forms ('snails'/'birds') which are swept into an overall movement, which seems to form the shape of a butterfly. Words and sentences are inserted inside confined shaded areas, integrated as a

part of the visual form. Two words are present in the upper part of the drawing as a kind of title, though not referring to any recognizable theme: “Mediziinische Fakultääät”. As a peculiar general characteristic, each of the myriad forms are graphically marked as if they contain material inside to be protected from the outside, or maybe to prevent any outside material from contaminating the interior of the form.



Figure 3: Wölfli 1907. *Felsenau*. © 2021 Adolf Wölfli Stiftung

In *figure 3* (*Felsenau*) there are recognizable components of a city; houses, buildings, trees, and what looks like a large factory chimney, presumably a part the city of Bern, protected/separated by a diagonal railing and river. We may assume that the river is Aare, which runs adjacent to Felsenau and through the center of Bern. Even if the elements refer to specific geographical places, they are still decorated and formed by the characteristic elements mentioned above. These elements make the geographical location look ‘alien’, since they participate in a pattern that serves a higher purpose than just representation. The symmetry is mirrored

around a diagonal strip, the river, and the entire drawing is framed with stylized self-portraits, 'snails' and 'vögeliis'. The strips direct the flows, making the drawing unmistakably repetitious and uncanny despite its formal references to a geographical location.

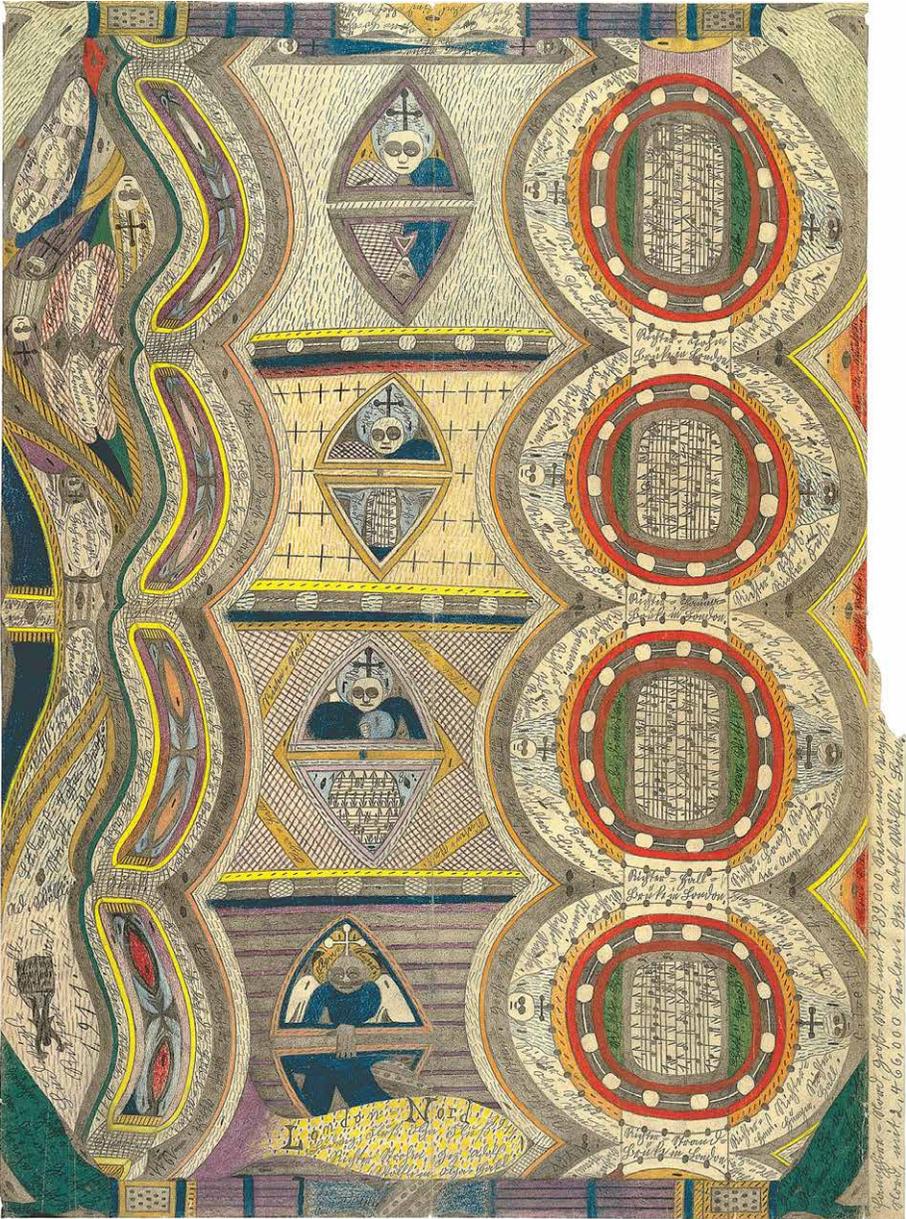


Figure 4: Wölfli 1911. London=Nord. © 2021 Adolf Wölfli Stiftung

In **figure 4** (*London=Nord*), though the capitalized word “London=Nord” indicates a geographical location, there are in this work no visible landmarks. Names and numbers are inserted in the strips, but the musical compositions are here a dominant element of the design, supported by elements and the strict symmetry. The abstraction here is intensified, compared to the drawings in figure 1 and 3, as well as the Christian symbols and the presence of St. Adolf in four separate spheres, each connected to the others by musical notes and a symbolic strips of stylized fishes. The symmetry is both vertical and horizontal, centered around the four larger self-portraits combined with crosses.

In **figure 5** (*Die Kreuzigung des heiligen Skt. Adolf*), the presence of the musical component and the Christian theme are intensified. The musical notes, the facial self-portraits and the crosses are arranged around a Christian crucifixion of an ornamental Adolf Wölfli-like image, in which a crown of thorns and marks of spikes in hands and feet are visible. The elements, birds and snails, are inserted in every bit of spaces



Figure 5: Wölfli 1914. *Die Kreuzigung des heiligen Skt. Adolf*. © 2021 Adolf Wölfli Stiftung

between the inserted pictures of four Saint-like figures resembling Wölfli, and higher above, a God-like Wölfli, presumably flanked by heavenly hymns. The symmetry is constructed around a vertical line in the center, though two horizontal lines divides the drawing in three realms. The structural division is rigid, and the rhythmic flow is here replaced by a strict rectangular design.

Though a certain development is visible through the four drawings, certain features are discernable in all of them: An excess of ornamental elements flowing in rhythmically movements, which directed by a structure of graphically marked borders of separation, imposing the impression of each element as an independent or isolated unit. This overflow of autonomous details seems to be in constant conflict with the strict symmetrical overall design. The repetitions of elements seem to be of a ritualistic importance, that is, they seem to be arranged in a necessary structure in each design, to infuse an alternative order associated with places, constructions, occurrences, symbols, names, etc.

The Divided Self

Now we will return to the concept of the self, and the implication of the peculiar division in Advaita Vedānta. The advaitic dichotomy of the self made visible the *Beiträge*'s parallel split: On the one hand the "I" that is part of the phenomenal nescience, on the other hand, the true principle of the self, the *Dasein*, concealed by the "I". This peculiar structure of the self reflects the fundamental division regarding nescience and truth, or in Heidegger's terms, the machination and Beyng. We are able to understand from these fundamental differences of meanings, the division that Wölfli expressed, i.e. the painful task of fixating the endless interior stream of visions, which are seemingly not controlled by an "I". In the works of Wölfli, this peculiar role of the divided self is expressed in a subversion of the position of the usual or familiar; a distancing that lets the artwork stand 'solitary' outside the common frame of relations (e.g. history of art, genres, biographies, sociological explanations, etc.). This signifies a movement away from the order of things into a 'nothingness' created by

the *split* within the self.

We return to our four drawings for illustrations of this point:

Figure 1 exhibits an overflow of ornamental elements and rhythmic flows of forms, whose lack of structured space leaves no room for a placing of an organized self. Instead we are faced with a dis-orientation through a flood of words, sounds, faces, eyes, mouths, shadows, gods, snakes, borders, patterns, brims; a reflections of a dying self, looking back at the spectator from a foreign world.

In **figure 3** the reconstructed site of the city shows a diagonal flow between two realms, divided in an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ of the separation. The fragmented city, vaguely recognizable, has been reassembled in a way which shows a new constructed space seen through the memories of a number of distributed selves.

Figure 4 shows the reduplication of four ascending realms, each centered around a self, each with its own musical composition, but attached to each other by a hieratical rigid scheme.

Figure 5 displays several distinctly marked insertions of smaller drawings, or ‘windows’, into a larger drawing, surrounded by a ‘loudness’ of musical arrangements, and a replacement of Christ with St. Adolf, a God-like figure festooned with hymns, words and ornamental figures and patterns. The self is both crucified, resurrected, divinized, and distributed throughout a choirs of saintly and angelic beings, showing a network of reduplicated “I”s with a presiding Self as the highest of all.

In all four drawings the intrusion of the Other [*Fremde, Andere*] is visible as a transforming factor [*Ereignis*], causing the overflow and destruction the normal self [*Ich, ahamkāra*]. This is present both as a horrifying feeling of losing the self in a fragmented world, and as an orchestral celebration of a different new order. Death is felt as the death of an “I”, as its final being-away [*Weg-sein*], bringing in an excess of nothingness [*Nichts*] which reflects that which has no center, and as such is injected into all forms and materials to be seen.

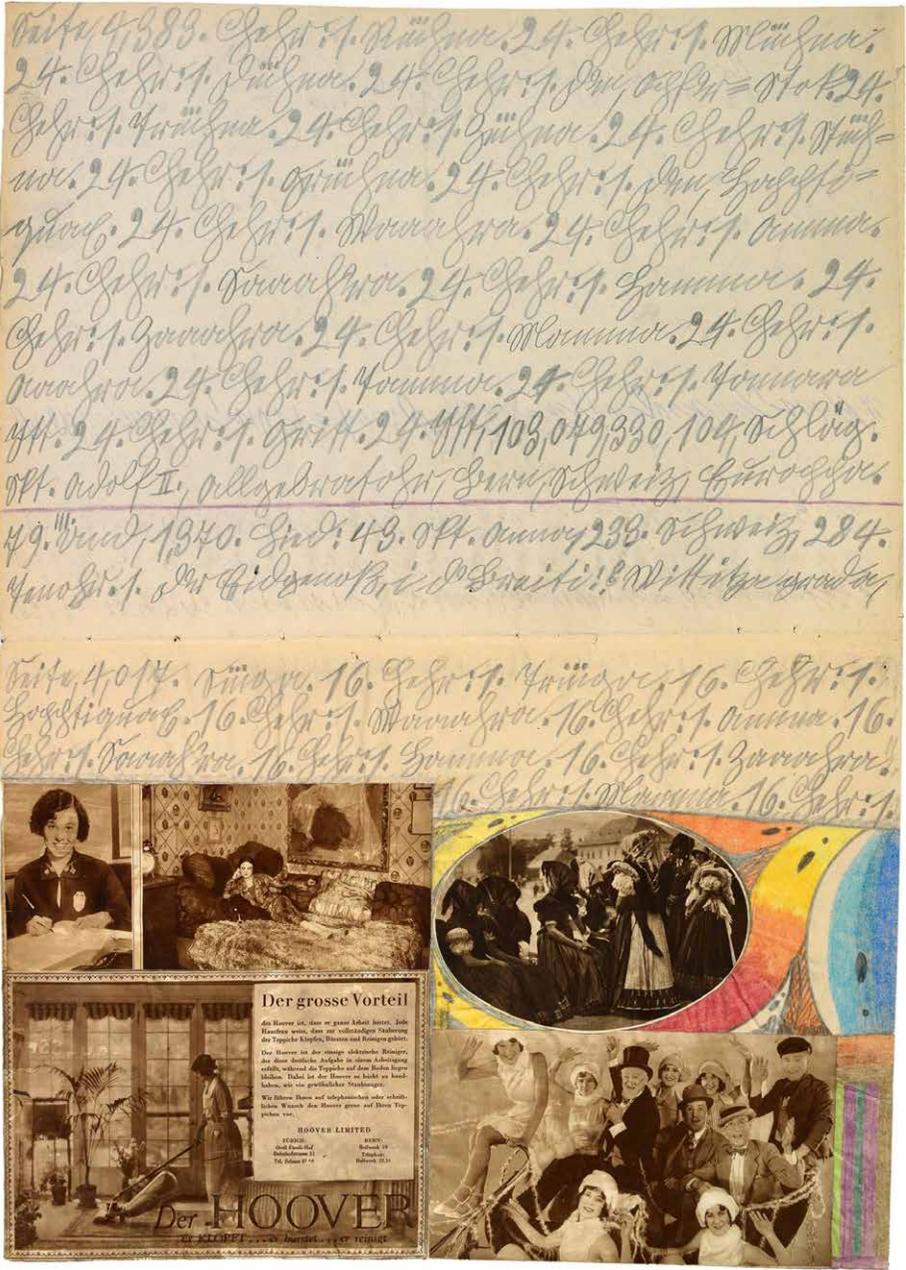


Figure 6: Wölfli 1929. Ohne Titel. © 2021 Adolf Wölfli Stiftung

An Excess of Refusal

We have seen in Heidegger's "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" that the concept of rift [*Riß*] plays an important role, in the sense of an original rupture and design of the strife between earth and world.

For Wölfli, this strife is expressed in the drawings in various ways. Between a centric representation of an "I" and a fragmented self and, and between death and celebration of those selves. Furthermore, we have observed in the drawings a conflictual relation between overflowing elements and the controlling power of borders and frames, or put simply: a tension between material flows and restrictive forms. These conflictual settings are raised in Wölfli's artworks in a way which echoes the original strife, beyond the normalized structure of a utility-Being.

The works of Wölfli *are* these conflictual relationships, and therefore a harmonic ideal can only be represented within a distorted arrangement like *figure 6*, shown above, taken from the last project, the 'Funeral March'.

Here we notice pictures taken from magazines and subordinated to a flow of hastily scribbled names and numbers, which undermines the images of idyllic scenes. The discomfort transferred from the drawings and collages are due to the ever present strangeness and conflictual rift, from which we look back on our, now estranged, common world.

The Distorting Ereignis

The character of nescience, *avidyā*, in Advaita Vedānta, manifests itself due to a beginningless ontological difference between Self (Being) and non-Self (beings), making possible a fundamental confusion/attraction, through which the flow of phenomena is formed. This ontological difference can only be seen in *retrospect* as a unifying conflict expressed in a mutual superimposition, or as an interdependence of concealment and clearing, since it has already exerted its impact, as reflected in a dualistic tension. If the original rift [*riß*] can be expressed in art, then it has to manifest as a radical Other, an alien intrusion into the familiar scheme, since it can only be seen through the effect of the same

rift. In Heidegger's analysis and his selection of Van Gogh to illustrate the rift, there is a symmetrical relationship between earth and world. This tends to undermine the radicality of the rupture and the effects of nescience. Both in Wölfli's artworks and tantric art, there is a tendency where the rift is uncontrollable; the work does not disappear back into the world of nescience. Thus, in Wölfli's artworks the rift is expressed in the difference between the flow of visions and the *fixation* of the same. The continual flow is mimicked in each drawing's strict rhythm and design - and between the drawings as their overall narrative, which binds the sheets together in an endless chain. These mimicking fixations are not part of a reconstruction of the 'true' inner stream, because they have already changed the flow before the fixation, and therefore the reality of the flow can only exist as that which is inherently absent. The event of truth, the *Ereignis*, is here present as the continual restoration of something irrevocably lost.

The truth then becomes the 'true' distortion of a distortion (*Machenschaft* or *avidyā*), and the event of truth becomes the destruction of the "I" and the reconstruction of a different structure, which refrains from controlling the self-secluding material aspect.

Conclusion

Why do we speak of *truth* and not of an *aesthetic experience*? In our perspective, such radical works of art are designed not to affect the emotional or cognitive faculties of a spectator; rather they trigger a pre-metaphysical understanding that displaces the delusions of an "I" and the schemes of machination. In our interpretation of Heidegger, though, we would choose an approach somewhat different from "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes", where the analysis of a painting of van Gogh accentuated an authentic lifeworld, invoking earth and world. Rather we would accentuate van Gogh's heightened use of complementary colors, and the connected collapse of the form-aspect into unstable vibrant material. Compared with Heidegger's more symmetrical analysis of earth and world, we would accentuate the denial of the appearing world of normality, this pointing

to the original conflictual rift of Beyng.

Why the *advaitic* perspective? The insistence of a radically different concept of truth, a complete Other, is nowhere more present than in the concept of a pervasive nescience and its possible obliteration through the inexpressible transformative *vidyā*.

This refusal is in Wölflī's works visible as a violent strife embedded in stylized tableaux, comprising an overflow of ornamental details in a continual conflict with forms and borders. This ever-present threatening loss of control seems to represent an ever present danger which has to be countered by the highest authority: The divine "I", St. Adolf, who overlooks the shattered spectacle of a number of reduplicated selves. In Wölflī's artworks the glimpse of truth is present as the denial of nescience; a negation that points to the source of reality through three conflictual settings: That between a continual stream of visions and a mimicking fixation of the same; that between the mourning of the collapse of the self and the celebration of the new worlds of the distributed selves; and that between an overflowing movement of mystic material and the opposite confinement of borders and frames. There is no 'new' truth in Wölflī's artworks, only the turbulence created by the absence truth in the midst of nescience.

ENDNOTES

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² I will in the following refer to both the German and the English editions: Heidegger 1989. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, and the English translation, Heidegger. 2012. *Contribution to Philosophy (of the Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz & Daniela Vallega-Neu.

³ Heidegger 1989/2012, 126/100.

⁴ Heidegger 1989/2012, 470/370.

⁵ Thibaut, George. 1962. *The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa with the commentary of Śaṅkara*. Vol.1-2.

⁶ Thibaut 1962, vol.1, p.34. Though not systematically in the beginning, there seem to be differences which were gradually developed from the time of Śaṅkara through the works of his followers; *māyā* became connected predominately to the projective function, while *avidyā* was generally used when referred to the veiling power.

⁷ Thibaut 1962, vol.1, p.3.

⁸ Thibaut 1962, vol.1, p.6.

⁹ Sastri, Suryanarayana S.S. and Kunhan C. Raja. 1933. *The Bhāmatī of Vācaspati on Śaṅkara's Brahmasutrabhāṣya (Catuṣṣūtrī)*.

¹⁰ Sastri 1933, 194.

¹¹ Heidegger 1989/2012, 101/80.

¹² Heidegger 1989/2012, 233/184.

¹³ Heidegger 1989/2012, 245/193.

¹⁴ Heidegger 1989/2012, 482/379.

¹⁵ Heidegger 1989/2012, 66-67/83-84.

¹⁶ Heidegger, Martin. 1980. "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes". In *Holzwege*, 1-72. English translation: Heidegger, Martin. 2002. "The Origin of the Work of Art". In *Off the Beaten Track*. Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, 1-56.

¹⁷ Heidegger 1989/2012, 392/310.

¹⁸ Heidegger 1980/2002, 23/16.

¹⁹ Heidegger 1980/2002, 31-33/24-25

²⁰ Robinson, T.M. 1987. *Heraclitus. Fragments*. p.49.

²¹ Heidegger 1980/2002, 49/37.

²² Heidegger 1980/2002, 49/38.

²³ Heidegger 1980/2002, 52/40.

²⁴ Stamm, Mikael. 2019. *Sacred Sound and Language in Classical Śaiva Siddhānta*. 40-41.

²⁵ Rangachari, R. 2010. *Saint Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam*. 162-169. The South Indian scripture *Periya Puranam* describes the lives of the sixty-three *Nāyanmārs*, the canonical poet-saints of the cult of Śaiva Siddhānta. The poetry of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār is included in the eleventh book of the holy *Thirumurai*, a collection of the most revered Tamil devotional hymns in praise of Śiva.

²⁶ Craddock, Elaine. 2010. *Śiva's Demon Devotee Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār*. 58.

²⁷ Heidegger, 1989/2012, 322/254-255.

²⁸ MacLagan, David. 2009. *Outsider Art: From the Margins to the Marketplace*. 7-14.

²⁹ An interesting point here is that the gradual acceptance of outsider art or its earlier continental term *Art Brut* coined by Jean Dubuffet, was conditioned by the art critics and art collectors to see outsider art in accordance with the modern concept of a lone artist expressing his talent or genius in artworks. Outsider art was considered an example of an unpolished but primordial creative impulse, something authentic

and unexploited. The outsider-label may on one hand catch a notion of a radical non-conventionalism, but on the other hand, it fails to capture the significance of a genuine difference, because such a labelling inevitably assimilates any ‘outside’ into an ‘inside’ of the established history of art.

³⁰ Morgenthaler, Walter. 1985. *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler: Adolf Wölfli*. 1-13.

³¹ Morgenthaler 1985, 13-16.

³² Impressum, “Adolf Wölfli: Werk“, [adolfwoelfli.ch](https://www.adolfwoelfli.ch), Adolf Wölfli Stiftung, 20-05-2021, <https://www.adolfwoelfli.ch/werk>

³³ Morgenthaler, 1985, p.48, and Spoerri, Elka. 2012. “Wölfli’s Vocabulary of Forms”. In *Wölfli: Creator of the Universe*. 268-273.

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