# KLOSSOWSKI'S READING OF NIETZSCHE
## IMPULSES, PHANTASMS, SIMULACRA, STEREOTYPES

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In his writings on Nietzsche, Pierre Klossowski makes use of various concepts—such as intensities, phantasms, simulacra and stereotypes, resemblance and dissemblance, gregariousness and singularity—that have no place in Nietzsche's own oeuvre. These concepts are Klossowski's own creations, his own contributions to thought. Although Klossowski consistently refused to characterize himself as a philosopher ("Je suis une 'maniaque,'" he once said, "Un point, c'est tout!"),[1] his work in its entirety was marked by an extraordinary conceptual creation. From this point of view, his *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* can be read as a work in philosophy—at least in the idiosyncratic sense given to this term by Gilles Deleuze, who defined philosophy as the creation or invention of concepts [Deleuze and Guattari 2]. No doubt, Klossowski remains an almost unclassifiable figure—philosopher, novelist, essayist, translator, artist—and attempting to analyze his work through the prism of philosophy may seem to be a reductive approach that belies the complexity of his exceptional oeuvre. Reading Klossowski as a conceptual innovator, however, at least has the advantage of allowing us to chart a consistent trajectory through his difficult and often labyrinthine text, without denying its other dimensions (affective, perceptive, literary, and so on). In what follows, then, I would like to examine three of Klossowski's most characteristic and important concepts—impulses and their intensities, phantasms, and simulacra and their stereotypes—as well as the precise interrelations he establishes among them. Taken together, these three concepts describe what Klossowski terms the tripartite economy of soul, which constitutes the implicit model through which he interprets Nietzsche's thought.

### 1

*Impulses as Fluctuating Intensities*

Klossowski describes his books on both Nietzsche and Sade as "essays devoted not to ideologies but to the physiognomies of problematic thinkers who differ greatly from each other" ["Postface" 137, emphasis added]. This emphasis on the "physiognomy" of thinkers reflects Nietzsche's insistence on taking the *body* rather than the mind as a guide for philosophy since the body is a more accessible phenomenon, less surrounded by myth and superstition. "The body and physiology as the starting point," Nietzsche wrote. "Why? . . . The phenomenon of the body is the richer, clearer, more tangible

1. *"I am a 'maniac,' period, that's all!" [qtd. in Gachnang 9].*

phenomenon. . . . Belief in the body is more fundamental than belief in the soul" [WP §§492, 489, 491]. Klossowski himself, however, when writing of the intensive status of the impulses, frequently makes use of the term "soul" (*âme*), owing in part, no doubt, to his interest in the theological literature of the mystics, such as Meister Eckhardt and Teresa of Avila. For the mystics, the depth of the soul is something irreducible and uncreated: it eludes the exercise of the created intellect, and can only be grasped negatively.[2] Nonetheless, if one can find a similar apophaticism (or "negative theology") in Klossowski, it is related exclusively to the immanent and chaotic movements of the soul's intensive affects, and not to the transcendence of God. What is incommunicable in the soul (or body) are its "impulses"—their fluctuations of intensity, their rises and falls, their manic elations and depressive descents, which are in constant variation.

Nietzsche himself had recourse to a highly varied vocabulary to describe what Klossowski summarizes in the term "impulse": "drive" (*Triebe*), "desire" (*Begierden*), "instinct" (*Instinke*), "power" (*Mächte*), "force" (*Kräfte*), "impulse" (*Reize, Impulse*), "passion" (*Leidenschaften*), "feeling" (*Gefülen*), "affect" (*Affekte*), "pathos" (*Pathos*), and so on.[3] Klossowski frequently employs the musical term *tonalité* to describe these states of the soul's fluctuating intensities—their diverse tones, timbres, and changing amplitudes—which can take on various forms ("aggressiveness, tolerance, intimidation, anguish, the need for solitude, the forgetting of oneself" [NVC 6]). At bottom, what these impulses express are what Klossowski calls the "obstinate singularity" of the human soul, which is by nature noncommunicable; they constitute "the unexchangeable depth" (*le fond inéchangeable*) or "the unintelligible depth" (*le fond unintelligible*) of the soul. What makes every individual a "singular case" or an "idiosyncrasy" is the unique constellation of impulses of which it is constituted. For Klossowski, the term "singular" is opposed not so much to the universal but to the gregarious, the species, what Nietzsche calls the "herd," which reduces the singularity of the individual to a common denominator and expresses only what can be communicated.

One of Nietzsche's most accessible descriptions of the impulse can be found in his early book *Daybreak* (1880):

> *Suppose we were in the market place one day and we noticed someone laughing at us as we went by: this event will signify this or that to us according to whether this or that drive happens at that moment to be at its height in us—and it will be a quite different event according to the kind of person we are. One person will absorb it like a drop of rain, another will shake it from him like an insect, another will try to pick a quarrel, another will examine his clothing to see if there is anything about it that might give rise to laughter, another will be led to reflect on the nature of laughter as such, another will be glad to have involuntarily augmented the amount of cheerfulness and sunshine in the world—and in each case, a drive has gratified itself, whether it be the drive to annoyance, or to combativeness or to reflection or to benevolence. This drive seized the event as its prey. Why precisely this one? Because, thirsty and hungry, it was lying in wait.* [§119]

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*2. See Arnaud [8–9], who cites Augustine, Meister Eckhardt, and Teresa of Avila as precursors to Klossowski. Arnaud's book is one of the best general introductions to Klossowski's work.*

*3. In English, the only treatment of Nietzsche's conception of the impulses comparable to Klossowski's is Graham Parkes's magisterial work,* Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology.

This text is an early description of Nietzsche's doctrine of *perspectivism* ("there are no facts, only interpretations"), but what is often overlooked is that, for Nietzsche, it is our *impulses* or *drives* that interpret the world, that are perspectival—and not our egos or our conscious opinions. All of us, as individuals, contain within ourselves "a vast confusion of contradictory drives" [WP 259], such that we are, as Nietzsche liked to say, multiplicities and not unities. It is not that I have a different perspective on the world than you do; it is rather that each of us has multiple perspectives on the world because of the multiplicity of our drives—drives that are often contradictory among themselves, and that are therefore in a constant struggle or combat with each other. "*Within ourselves,*" Nietzsche writes, "we can also be egoistic or altruistic, hard-hearted, magnanimous, just, lenient, insincere, can cause pain or give pleasure" [qtd. in Parkes 291–92]. This is also where Nietzsche first developed his concept of the will to power—at the level of the impulses or drives. "Every drive is a kind of lust to rule," he writes, "each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm" [WP 481].

It is true that we can fight against the drives, struggle against the dominance of the passions—this is one of the oldest themes in philosophy, from Platonism through Christianity. But Nietzsche asks: *who* exactly undertakes such a struggle against the drives? "While 'we' believe we are complaining about the vehemence of a drive," Nietzsche answers, "at bottom it is one drive *which is complaining about the other*; that is to say: for us to become aware that we are suffering from the *vehemence* of a drive presupposes the existence of another equally vehement or even more vehement drive, and that a *struggle* is in prospect in which our intellect is going to have to take sides" [*Daybreak* §109]. We tend to take our predominant drive and for the moment turn it into the whole of our ego, placing all our weaker drives perspectivally farther away, as if those other drives weren't me but rather something else, something other inside me, a kind of "it," like the Freudian *id*. When we talk about the "I," we are primarily indicating which drive, at the moment, is strongest and sovereign. "The feeling of the 'I' is always strongest where the preponderance [*Übergewicht*] is," and my so-called "self-identity" is in fact a differential flickering from drive to drive. In other words, what we call thinking, willing, and feeling are all "merely a relation of these drives to each other" [BGE 36]. There is no struggle of reason against the drives, since what we call "reason" is, in Nietzsche's view, nothing more than a certain "system of relations between various passions" [WP 387], a certain ordering of the drives.[4]

This emphasis on fluctuating intensities of the body's impulses is one of the consequences of Nietzsche's declaration of the "death of God." One of Klossowski's most persistent themes is that the death of God implies the loss of both the identity of the Self and the coherence of the World. The Self, the World, and God are the three great terminal points of traditional metaphysics, which Kant had exposed as "transcendent illusions" in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If God is dead, then all possible creation

*4. In the* Gay Science, *Nietzsche considers the familiar example of becoming more reasonable, of "growing up." "Something that you formerly loved as a truth or probability," Nietzsche writes, "[now] strikes you as an error;" so you cast it off "and fancy that it represents a victory for your reason" [GS 307]. But it is less a victory for reason, for* your *reason, than a shift in the relations among the drives. "Perhaps this error was as necessary for you then," Nietzsche continues, "when you were a different person—you are always a different person—as are all your present 'truths.' . . . What killed that opinion for you was your new life [that is, a new drive] and not your reason: you no longer need it, and now it collapses and unreason crawls out of it into the light like a worm. When we criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm—something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet" [GS 307].*

comes not from God but from chaos, that is, from the impulses, and human beings are only the prolonged extremity of chaos. However, the death of God does not imply a rejection of religion, but rather its *revitalization,* a claim that Klossowski explored in his early essay "Nietzsche, Polytheism, and Parody." *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents a fable explaining the transition from polytheism to monotheism (or what he elsewhere calls "monoto-theism"): when one of the gods declared himself to be the only god (the monotheistic god), the other gods (the gods of polytheism) laughed and slapped their knees and rocked in their chairs—until they laughed themselves to death![5] Polytheism died of laughter. For Nietzsche, the creation of gods is one of the fundamental creative tasks of religion—just as for Deleuze the creation of concepts is one of the fundamental creative tasks of philosophy—and gods and demons are themselves the figures of the impulses and their fluctuating intensities. If polytheism is the expression of the multiplicity of the soul's impulses, its great *mise-en-scène,* monotheism implies the subordination of all the other impulses to the domination of a single, sovereign impulse, which Nietzsche, in the *Genealogy of Morals,* would identify as the impulse of *ressentiment*. The revaluation of values envisioned by Nietzsche necessarily implies the creation of new gods—that is to say, new affects. "How many new gods are still possible!" Nietzsche writes. "As for myself, in whom the religious, that is to say, god-forming instinct occasionally becomes active at impossible times—how differently, how variously the divine has revealed itself to me each time" [WP 534, §1038; qtd. in Klossowski, NVC 209]. What Klossowski found in the religions of antiquity was a growling chaos of demons and goddesses expressing the fluctuation of the impulses: his great text, *Diana at Her Bath,* is explicitly presented as a kind of polytheistic inversion of Augustine's monotheistic *City of God,* pointing to a religion of the future.

But the question Klossowski constantly poses about the impulses is: what criteria of value can one apply to the impulses if we can no longer appeal to a transcendent order (as in Plato), or a transcendental subjectivity (as in Kant), or the moments of an evolutionary dialectic (as in Hegel)? The criteria must become internal to the impulses themselves. Which impulses are healthy? Which are expressions of morbidity or sickness? Which are singular? Which express a will to gregariousness? Which are vigorous? Which are decadent?[6] If the impulses interpret, then the question is one of determining the "type" of interpretation offered by a given impulse or affect: active versus reactive, strong versus weak, healthy versus morbid, and so on.

In *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle,* Klossowski stresses the fact that Nietzsche's own *valetudinary states* provided him with a kind of laboratory in which he could study the life of the impulses. In his letters and notes, Nietzsche provides an almost constant evaluation of the implications of his migraines and illnesses. "My nervous system is splendid in view of the immense work it has to do; it is quite sensitive but very strong, a source of astonishment to me" [qtd. in NVC 21]. Or again: "My existence a *dreadful burden*: I would have rejected it long ago had I not been making the most instructive experiments in the intellectual and moral domain in just this condition of suffering and almost complete renunciation—this joyous mood, avid for knowledge, raised me to heights where I triumphed over every torture and almost all despair" [qtd. in NVC 20]. Exactly what experiments was Nietzsche conducting with his own impulses? When Nietzsche experienced his migraines, Klossowski surmises, he not only found it impossible to read or even write, he also found it impossible to *think*. He experienced

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*5. Nietzsche,* Thus Spoke Zarathustra *201; part 3, §8, "Of the Apostates." For a recent historical treatment of this theme, see Kirsch.*

*6. Klossowski analyzes these criteria in chapter 4 of* Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle, *"The Valetudinary States at the Origin of Four Criteria: Decadence, Vigor, Gregariousness, the Singular Case" [74–92].*

his migraines as an aggression of his organism that suspended his own thought, his own thinking. "Once he recovered his faculties, he tried to describe this suspension of thought, to reflect on the functioning of the brain in relation to the other organic functions—and he began to distrust his own brain" [NVC 23]. Why this distrust? The issue concerns nothing other than our experience of the *unity* of ourselves as subjects. What makes us experience the chaotic life of the impulses as having a unity is the *phantasm* of what Klossowski calls, in French, the *suppôt*. This word is derived from the Latin *suppositum,* "that which is placed under," and is closely linked to the terms *substantia* ("substance") or *subjectum* ("subject"). For Klossowski, the *suppôt* (or self) is itself a phantasm, a complex and fragile entity that bestows a psychic and organic unity upon the moving chaos of the impulses. It does this in part through the grammatical fiction of the "I," which interprets the impulses in terms of a hierarchy of gregarious needs (both material and moral), and dissimulates itself through a network of concepts (substance, cause, identity, self, world, God) that reduces the combat of the impulses to silence.[7]

"To understand Nietzsche," writes Klossowski, "it is important to see this reversal brought about by the organism: *the most fragile organ it has developed* [namely, the brain, the nervous system] comes to dominate the body, one might say, *because of* its very fragility" [NVC 27]. There is thus an intimate link, in Nietzsche's thought, between the intellect or consciousness, on the one hand, and language and communication, on the other. Both the intellect and language are in the service of the species, gregariousness, the herd—and not in the service of the singular case. As Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science:*

> *It seems to me that the subtlety and strength of consciousness always were proportionate to a man's (or animal's)* capacity for communication. . . . *Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to* consciousness *is only the smallest part of this—the most superficial and worst part—for only this conscious thinking* takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication. . . . *My idea is that consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature. . . . Fundamentally, all our actions are altogether incomparably personal, unique, and infinitely individual; there is no doubt of that. But as soon as we translate them into consciousness* they no longer seem to be. . . . *Whatever becomes conscious* becomes *by the same token shallow, thin, relatively stupid. . . . All becoming conscious involves a great and thorough corruption, falsification, reduction to superficialities, and generalization. . . . We "know" (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be* useful *in the interests of the human herd, the species*. [GS §354]

Even our "inner experience"—that which is seemingly most personal and most immediate to us—is subject to the same falsification: "'Inner experience' enters our consciousness only after it has found a language the individual understands. . . . 'To understand' means merely: to be able to express something new in the language of something old and familiar" [WP 479]. In Klossowski's terms, the function of language and the intellect is to convert *intensity* into *intention.*

The task Nietzsche set himself, then, was an almost impossible task: to think without the ego, to think not from the viewpoint of his conscious intellect, but rather from the complex viewpoint of the drives and impulses. "*Stop feeling oneself as this phantastic ego!*" Nietzsche admonished himself in one of his notebooks. "Learn gradually

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*7. For a detailed analysis of Klossowski's theory of the* suppôt, *see Madou 35–41.*

*to jettison the supposed individual!* Discover the errors of the ego! Realize that *egoism is an error!* But not to be understood as the opposite of altruism! That would be love of *other supposed* individuals! No! *Get beyond* 'me' and 'you'! *Experience cosmically!*" And again: "What is needed is *practice* in seeing with *other* eyes: practice in seeing apart from human relations, and thus seeing *objectively!*" [KSA 9: 11[7, 10]; qtd. in Parkes 300].

## 2

*Phantasms as Obsessional Images*

This brings us to the second fundamental concept of Klossowski's tripartite economy of soul: the *phantasm*. In Klossowski, the term refers to *an obsessional image* produced within us by the unconscious forces of our impulsive life; the phantasm is what makes each of us a singular case. "My true themes," writes Klossowski of himself, "are dictated by one or more obsessional (or "obsidianal") instincts that seek to express themselves."[8] Or as he says elsewhere, "I am only the *seismograph* of the life of the impulses" [qtd. in Monnoyer 61]. The word comes from the Greek *phantasia* (appearance, imagination), and was taken up in a more technical sense in psychoanalytic theory (theory of fantasy). For Klossowski, however, a phantasm is not, as in Freud, a substitution formation. As Lyotard explains, the phantasm "is not an unreality or dereality, it is 'something' that grips the wild turbulence of the libido, something it invents as an incandescent object" [72].

Nietzsche himself tended to interpret the thought of the great philosophers in terms of their phantasms, that is, in terms of their dominant or sovereign impulses: philosophers simply express the movements of their own intensive states under the guidance of their dominant impulse (the will to knowledge). As Klossowski writes, "They claim it is a question of 'the truth'—when at bottom it is only a question of themselves. Or rather: their most violent impulse is brought to light with all the impudence and innocence of a fundamental impulse: it makes itself sovereign. . . . The philosopher is only a kind of occasion and chance through which the impulse is finally able to speak. . . . What then did Spinoza or Kant do? Nothing but interpret their dominant impulse. But it was only the *communicable* part of their behavior that could be translated into their constructions" [NVC 4–5]. This is not dissimilar to Heidegger's claim that a philosopher thinks only one thought (in his case, the thought of "being"), or Bergson's claim that every philosopher has one intuition, and that the vastness of a philosopher's oeuvre can be explained by the incommensurability between this intuition and the means they have at their disposal for expressing it ["Philosophical Intuition" 107–09]. In itself, the phantasm is incommunicable because it is unintelligible and unspeakable; but it is because it is unintelligible and incommunicable that it is also *obsessive*. Unintelligibility, incommunicability, and obsession are themselves the intensive components of Klossowski's concept of the phantasm.

Gilles Deleuze has provided a penetrating analysis of the nature of the phantasm in his book *Proust and Signs*—even though he does not use the term "phantasm"—notably in the context of Proust's discussions of love. Falling in love is an intensity, a high tonality of the soul, and our initial temptation is to seek the meaning of that intensity, its explanation, in the object of our love, as if the beloved somehow held the secret to the

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*8. Klossowski, "Protase et apodose" 10. Portions of this essay have been reprinted in Klossowski's* La ressemblance.

intensity of our passion. But inevitably, the other person disappoints on this score, and we then turn to ourselves to uncover the secret, thinking that perhaps the intensity was sparked simply by subjective associations we made in ourselves between the beloved and, perhaps, someone else (other lovers) or something else (a place, a moment). But this too fails. For what lies behind our loves—behind both the objectivist temptation and the subjectivist compensation—is an incommunicable phantasm (which Proust himself called an "essence" rather than a phantasm). The fact is that our loves tend to repeat themselves: we fall in love with the same "type," we fall into the same patterns, we seem to make the same mistakes—our loves seem to form a series in which something is being repeated, but always with a slight difference. This "something" is nothing other than our phantasm, which we repeat obsessively but which in itself remains incommunicable and continues its secret work in us, despite all our attempts to decipher it. But as Deleuze notes, this amorous repetition is never a sterile or naked repetition of a prior identity; it is always a clothed or masked repetition of a difference, the repetition is always productive of differences. "To repeat is to behave, but in relation to something unique or singular, which has nothing similar or equivalent. . . . The mask is the true subject of repetition. It is because repetition differs in nature from representation that what is repeated cannot be represented, but must always be signified, masked by what signifies it, itself masking what it signifies" [*Difference and Repetition* 17–18]. What Klossowski calls a simulacrum, as we shall see, is a mask that, denouncing itself as such, traces the contours of what it dissimulates—namely, the phantasm as such. Proust himself says that it is only in art that such essences or phantasms are revealed (not in the object, not in the subject): it is only in art that the time we have lost in our loves can be regained and recovered.

Readers of Klossowski's fictions will be familiar with the phantasm that was the primary object of his own obsession: the figure of Roberte, which he calls (in his postface to the trilogy *The Laws of Hospitality*) the "unique sign" of his work. Since the phantasm is by nature incommunicable, the subject who submits himself to its irresistible constraint can never have done with describing it. Klossowski's narrative work is thus traversed by a single repetition, carried along by one and the same movement. In effect, it is always the same scene that is repeated. The rape of Roberte in *Roberte, ce soir,* the theatrical representations in *Le souffleur,* the vision of the goddess in *Diana at Her Bath,* the description of the statue of Saint Teresa in *The Baphomet*—all articulate one and the same phantasm: the woman discovering the presence of her body under the gaze or the violence of a third party, who, whether an angel or a demon, communicates a guilty voluptuousness. Klossowski describes the entirety of his literary output in terms of his relation to this fundamental obsession: "I am under the dictation [*dictée*] of an image. It is the vision that demands that I say everything the vision gives to me" [qtd. on the back cover of Arnaud].

What, then, was Nietzsche's fundamental phantasm? Klossowski suggests that Nietzsche's most intense phantasm was the *eternal return*. (One should note, however, that the eternal return was not Nietzsche's only phantasm—Greece was a phantasm for the young Nietzsche, and Klossowski does not overlook the phantasms revealed in Nietzsche's own loves, such as Lou Andreas-Salomé and Cosima Wagner.) Nietzsche's phantasm of the eternal return was *not* one of the explicit doctrines of Nietzsche's philosophy, nor even a thought, but, rather, a *lived experience,* which was revealed to Nietzsche in Sils-Maria in August 1881 and experienced as an impulse, an intensity, a high tonality of the soul—indeed as the *highest* possible intensity of the soul. It was with the revelation of the eternal return that Nietzsche's quest to find the highest, the most powerful affect, the healthiest and most vigorous impulse, the most *affirmative* affect, was fulfilled. Thoughts, according to Nietzsche, are the signs of a play and

Diana Cooper
*Speedway* (back) (2002)

combat of affects; they always depend on their hidden roots. On this score, Klossowski emphasizes the impression of strangeness felt by both Salomé and Franz Overbeck (his closest friend) when he revealed the eternal return to them—the disturbing tone of his hoarse voice, the spectacular character of the communication. Although Nietzsche would seek numerous forms of expression for the eternal return—ethical, scientific, or cosmological—none of them was capable of expressing the fundamental incommunicability of the phantasm itself. This is why Klossowski says that the eternal return is not a doctrine, but rather the *simulacrum* of a doctrine.

## 3

### *Simulacra and Their Stereotypes*

This then brings us to the third term in Klossowski's vocabulary: the simulacrum. A "simulacrum" is a willed reproduction of a phantasm (in a literary, pictorial, or plastic form) that simulates this invisible agitation of the soul. Klossowski writes: "The simulacrum, in its *imitative* sense, is the actualization of something in itself incommunicable and nonrepresentable: the *phantasm* in its obsessional constraint."[9] The term *simulacrum* comes from the Latin *simulare* (to copy, represent, feign), and during the late Roman Empire it referred to the statues of the gods that often lined the entrance to a city. More precisely, the simulacrum was an object that, although fabricated by humans, was the measure of the invisible power of the gods. According to Hermes Trismegistes, artists cannot animate the status of the gods by themselves; they have to invoke the souls of the gods, they have to seduce a demonic force, through imposture, in order to capture it and enclose it in an idol or image. *Simulacrum* is thus a sculptural term, which Klossowski applies, by extension, to pictorial, verbal, and written representations. Simulacra are verbal, plastic, or written transcriptions of phantasms, artifacts which *count as* (or are *equivalent to,* can be exchanged for) phantasms. In Klossowski, these demonic forces no longer refer to gods and goddesses, but to impulses and affects; more precisely, gods and goddesses are themselves simulacra of impulses and affects. In Klossowski, *mimesis* is not a servile imitation of the visible, but the simulation of the unrepresentable.[10]

For this reason, simulacra stand in a complex relationship to what Klossowski, in his later works, calls a "stereotype."[11] On the one hand, the invention of simulacra always presupposes a set of prior stereotypes—what Klossowski calls, in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle,* "the code of everyday signs"—which express the gregarious aspect of lived experience in a form already schematized by the habitual usages of feeling and thought (the herd). In this sense, the code of everyday signs necessarily inverts and falsifies the singularity of the soul's intensive movements by making them intelligible: "How can one give an account of an irreducible depth of sensibility except by acts that betray it? It would seem that such an irreducible depth can never be reflected on or grasped save by acts perpetrated outside of thought—unreflected or ungraspable

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*9. Klossowski,* La ressemblance *76. Klossowski's theory of the simulacrum has had an immense impact on contemporary French thought. For the most important interpretations, see Michel Foucault, "The Prose of Acteon," and Maurice Blanchot, "Le rire des dieux."*

*10. Madou,* Démons et simulacres *88. One should note that Klossowski, unlike Baudrillard (who takes up the concept of the simulacrum in his own manner), never doubts the real—simulacra are no less real than phantasms or impulses.*

*11. For Klossowski's theory of the stereotype, see "On the Use of Stereotypes and the Censure Exercised by Classical Syntax," in "Protase et apodose" 15–20.*

acts."[12] Klossowski explains the movement that, through the phantasm, translates the movement of the impulses into the code of everyday signs: "For the impulses to become a will at the level of consciousness, the latter must give the impulse an exciting state as an aim, and thus must elaborate the signification of what, for the impulse, is a phantasm: an anticipated excitation, and thus a possible excitation according to the schema determined by previously experienced excitations. . . . A phantasm, or several phantasms, can be formed in accordance with the relations among impulsive forces. . . . In this manner, something new and unfamiliar is misinterpreted as something already known" [NVC 47].

On the other hand, Klossowski also speaks of a "science of stereotypes" in which the stereotype, by being "accentuated" to the point of excess, can itself bring about a critique of its own gregarious interpretation of the phantasm: "Practiced advisedly, the institutional stereotypes (of syntax) provoke the presence of what they circumscribe; their circumlocutions conceal the incongruity of the phantasm but at the same time trace the outline of its opaque physiognomy" [16–19]. Klossowski's prose is itself an example of this science of stereotypes. By his own admission, his works are written in a "'conventionally' classical syntax" that makes systematic use of the literary tenses and conjunctions of the French language, giving it a decidedly erudite, precious, and even "bourgeois" tone, but in an exaggerated manner that brings out its phantasmic structure. As Klossowski writes, "the simulacrum effectively simulates the constraint of the phantasm only by exaggerating the stereotypical schemes: to add to the stereotype and accentuate it is to bring out the obsession of which it constitutes the replica" [*La ressemblance* 78]. If Klossowski has given up writing since 1970, it is at least in part because, in attempting to express the incommunicable phantasm, he prefers the eloquence of bodily gestures and images—what he calls "corporeal idioms"—to the medium of words and syntax. "There is but one universal authentic language: the exchange of bodies through the secret language of incorporeal signs" [qtd. in Arnaud 104].

But whatever medium Klossowski uses, we can sense the vertiginous nature of this game between simulacra and stereotypes. If simulacra later became the object of demonology in Christian thought, it is because the simulacrum is not the "opposite" of the gregarious stereotype—just as the demonic is not the opposite of the divine, Satan is not the Other, the pole farthest from God, the absolute antithesis—but something much more bewildering: the Same, the perfect double, the exact semblance, the doppelganger, the angel of light whose deception is so complete that it is impossible to tell the impostor (Satan, Lucifer) apart from the "reality" (God, Christ), just as Plato reaches the point, in the *Sophist,* where Socrates and the Sophist are rendered indiscernible. Klossowski's concern is not the problem of the Other but the problem of the Same. The demonic simulacrum thus stands in stark contrast to the theological "symbol" (Tillich, Eliade), which is always iconic, the analogical manifestation of a transcendent instance.[13] Since incoherence is the law of Klossowski's universe, he who dissimulates the most is he who most resembles his invisible model.

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*12. Klossowski,* Sade My Neighbor *14. Cf. "Protase et apodose" 19: "In the domain of communication (literary or pictorial), the stereotype (as "style") is the residue of a simulacrum (corresponding to an obsessional constraint) that has fallen to the level of current usage, disclosed and abandoned to a common interpretation" [19].*

*13. On these themes, see Michel Foucault's essay on Pierre Klossowski, "La prose d'Acteon." Klossowski initially retrieved the concept of the simulacrum from the criticisms of the church fathers against the debauched representations of the gods on the Roman stage. See Klossowski,* Sacred and Mythical Origins of Certain Practices of the Women of Rome *132–38, as well as Jean-François Lyotard's commentaries on Klossowski in* Libidinal Economy *66–94.*

## 4

*The Tripartite Economy of the Soul: The Euphoria at Turin*

What one finds in Klossowski, then, is a kind of threefold circuit in the economy of the soul: first, there are impulses, with their rises and falls in intensity, their elations and depressions, which have no meaning or goal in themselves; second, these impulses give rise to phantasms, which constitute the incommunicable depth and singularity of the individual soul (and the "ego" or the "self" is itself a phantasm that ascribes a unity to our impulsive life in the service of the species or the herd); third, under the obsessive constraint of the phantasm, simulacra are produced, which are the reproduction or repetition of the phantasm (through the exaggeration of stereotypes). If Klossowski presents *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* as primarily an interpretation of Nietzsche's physiognomy, it is because it attempts to follow this threefold circuit as it is expressed in Nietzsche's thought: first, he attempts to describe the impulses or intensive powers that exercised their constraint on Nietzsche (notably those associated with his valetudinary states); second, he identifies the various phantasms they produced in him (notably the phantasm of the eternal return, as the highest and most affirmative affect of the soul); and third, he presents an exposition of the various simulacra Nietzsche created to express these phantasms (namely, the concepts, doctrines, and figures of what we know as Nietzsche's "philosophy").

What is the aim or goal of this threefold circuit, its intention? "Nietzsche's unavowable project," writes Klossowski, "is to act *without intention*: the impossible morality. Now the total economy of this intentionless universe creates intentional beings. The species "man" is a creation of this kind—*pure chance*—in which the intensity of forces is inverted into *intention*: the work of morality. The function of the simulacrum is *to lead human intention back to the intensity of forces,* which generate phantasms" [NVC 140]. But what exactly does this mean: "to lead human intention back to the intensity of forces"? On this question, perhaps the most important text in Klossowski's book on Nietzsche is the penultimate chapter, "The Euphoria of Turin," which examines Nietzsche's breakdown and madness through an analysis of the letters and notes Nietzsche wrote during the week of 31 Dec 1888 through 6 Jan 1889.

There are two problematic readings of Nietzsche's madness: either madness is taken to be the logical and internal outcome of Nietzsche's philosophy, or else it was caused by an external cause (a syphilitic infection), having nothing whatsoever to do with the philosophy as such. Klossowski cuts a middle path between these two extremes. No one, he says, was more aware than Nietzsche of the tension between the *incoherence* of the impulses and the *coherence* of the subject (*suppôt*) that makes these impulses a property of the self. This is, at least in part, what Nietzsche meant by the famous phrase of *Ecce Homo,* "Dionysus versus the Crucified": Dionysus is the god of metamorphoses, of affirmation, who affirms the healthy and strong impulses in all their incoherence, whereas the Crucified is the god of the weak, of gregariousness, of the herd, defender of the responsible self. This is why Klossowski emphasizes the importance of Nietzsche's migraines, for it was precisely when the lucidity of Nietzsche's brain was suspended that his self would be broken down into a kind of lucidity that was much more vast, but more brief—a lucidity in which these mute forces and impulses of the body were awakened [NVC 31]. By examining these alterations in his valetudinary states, Klossowski suggests, Nietzsche was searching for a new type of cohesion between his thought and the body as a *corporealizing* thought—that is, the body no longer as a property of the self, but as the fortuitous locus of impulses. Nietzsche, in other words, wanted to use his own lucidity to penetrate the shadows of the impulses. But how can one remain lucid if, in order to penetrate the shadows of the impulses, one

must destroy the very locus of lucidity, namely, the self? For a long time, Nietzsche was content to observe this to-and-fro movement between the incoherence of the impulses (intensity) and the coherence of the self (intention).

What happened at Turin? It was the moment of apotheosis, where Nietzsche finally led "human intention back to the intensity of forces." "Nietzsche," writes Klossowski, "was never more lucid than during these final days in Turin. *What he was conscious of was the fact that he had ceased to be Nietzsche,* that he had been, as it were, emptied of his person" [NVC 235]. Nietzsche did not suddenly lose his reason and begin to identify himself with strange personages; more precisely, Nietzsche the professor had lost (or abrogated) his identity and lucidly abandoned himself to the incoherence of the impulses, each of which now received a proper name of its own. The fact that he signed several of his letters as "The Crucified," that he chose the physiognomy of Christ to mask the loss of his own identity, shows the enormity of Nietzsche's ecstasy: Dionysus and the Crucified are no longer in opposition, but in a tenuous equilibrium. Nietzsche's delirium, in short, passed through a series of intensive states, in which his impulses each received various proper names, some of which designated his allies, or manic rises in intensity (Prado, Lesseps, Chambie, "honest criminals"), while others designated his enemies, or depressive falls in intensity (Caiaphus, William Bismark, the "antisemites")—a chaos of pure oscillations invested by "all the names of history" (and not, as certain psychoanalysts would have it, by "the name of the father").

The seeming lucidity of Nietzsche's madness was attested to, curiously, by the witness of two of Nietzsche's closest friends. On 21 January 1890, one year after Nietzsche's collapse in Turin, Peter Gast (Nietzsche's amanuensis) visited his friend at the asylum in Jena. "He did not look very ill," Gast later wrote. "I almost had the impression that his mental disturbance consists of no more than a heightening of the humorous antics he used to put on for an intimate circle of friends. He recognized me immediately, embraced and kissed me, was highly delighted to see me, and gave me his hand repeatedly as if unable to believe I was really there." But going for long walks with Nietzsche every day, Gast could see that he did not want to be "cured": "it seemed—horrible though this is—as if Nietzsche were merely feigning madness, as if he were glad for it to have ended this way." These observations correspond with Franz Overbeck's feelings when he came to see Nietzsche a month later, in February: "I cannot escape the ghastly suspicion . . . that his madness is simulated. This impression can be explained only by the experiences I have had of Nietzsche's self-concealments, of his spiritual masks. But here too I have bowed to facts which overrule all personal thoughts and speculations" [qtd. in Hayman 340–41].

Although Klossowski does not cite these observations by Gast and Overbeck, he nonetheless poses the inevitable question: where does Nietzsche's thought arrive at in this simulation of madness? "Nietzsche's obsessive thought," Klossowski suggests, "had always been that events, actions, apparent decisions, and indeed the entire world have a completely different aspect from those they have taken on, since the beginning of time, in the sphere of language. Now he [Nietzsche] saw the world beyond language: was it the sphere of *absolute muteness,* or on the contrary the sphere of *absolute language*?" [NVC 251]. Klossowski necessarily leaves the question unanswered. Earlier in the book, he cites a note from the spring of 1888 in which Nietzsche exhibited a certain guardedness about his condition, which obviously waned at the end of the year. It is entitled "The Most Dangerous Misunderstanding," and it concerns those who are taken to be sick or mad. Does their intoxication stem from an overfullness of life, Nietzsche asks, or from a truly pathological degeneration of the brain? How can one discern the *rich* type from an *exhausted* type? This was Nietzsche's double fear as expressed in *Ecce Homo*: the fear of being taken for a prophet, but also the fear of being taken for a "buffoon for all eternity" [NVC 86]. In short, how can one tell if the

"high tonality" of the *Stimmung* of the eternal return is an expression of health and overabundance, or an expression of exhaustion and sickness? This is a question derived from the paradoxical (or "antinomial") status of the doctrine of the eternal return. As a lived experience, Nietzsche initially experienced the eternal return not as a thought, but as an impulse, a *Stimmung,* a "high tonality of the soul." As a *thought,* then, Klossowski insists that the eternal return can only ever be the *simulacrum* of a doctrine: it attempts to communicate a phantasm that is fundamentally incommunicable, and thus is a simulation (and hence a perversion) of that phantasm. Moreover, this paradox finds its concrete manifestation in the direct manipulation of the affects by our modern industrial (or capitalist) organization—for what is "marketing" or "advertising" but a willed and conscious manipulation of the affects *in the service of* gregarious needs and wants? The flows and metamorphoses of capital and commodities, with neither aim nor goal, are a concrete form of the most malicious caricature of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return [NVC 171]. Klossowski's book *Living Currency* [*La monnaie vivante*] continues his reflection on the destiny of the impulses in industrial societies, and constitutes a kind of parody of political economy (insofar as the modern industrial and capitalistic order can itself be seen as a parody of the eternal return itself).

Each of these concepts—impulses and intensities, phantasms, simulacra and stereotypes—would require a more detailed analysis than we have been able to give them here. Taken together, however, they point to what I take to be the primary significance of Klossowski's thought. With this circuit of impulse-phantasm-simulacrum, Klossowski has isolated the baroque and labyrinthine logic of the simulacrum, with its complex operations of similitude, simultaneity, simulation, and dissimilation. It is something he uncovers not only in Nietzsche's madness—which he neither condemns nor romanticizes—but also in the many other writers that that have commanded his attention: the Marquis de Sade and his perversions; Jonathan Swift and his disproportionate vision of Gulliver, and so on. The Klossowskian economy thus follows a kind of circle: the impulses of the soul engender phantasms, from which are produced simulacra, which harden into stereotypes, but which in turn flow back to the originary vision, the originary pathos of the impulses. In this sense, there is no means to uncover the "truth" or ultimate meaning of this circuit, since it simply makes manifest what Deleuze would later call the "power of the false." Or as Klossowski says, "if we demystify, it is only to mystify further" [NVC 131, trans. modified].

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